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"Are they ready? Will they cope?" An exploration of the journey from pre-school to school for children with additional support needs who had their school entry delayed

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“Are they ready? Will they cope?”
An exploration of the journey from
pre-school to school for children
with additional support needs who
had their school entry delayed

Heather Gorton

Modules one to five of a Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology

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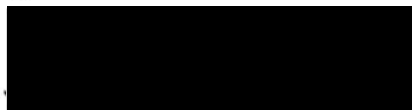
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Declaration

I declare that I am the author of this thesis and that, unless otherwise stated, I have consulted all the references cited. This thesis is a record of research work that I have personally carried out and has not previously been submitted or accepted for a higher degree.

Signature of doctoral candidate



Heather Gorton

Date: 18th March 2013

Signatures of supervisors



Divya Jindal-Snape

Date: 26.3.13



Elizabeth Hannah

Date: 26.3.13

Abbreviations and Terminology

PP	Principal Psychologist-overall psychological services manager
AP	Area Principal Psychologist-At the time of collecting data for this study each area principal managed a team of educational psychologists and carried specific areas of responsibility within the service.
EP	Educational Psychologist. All those named so far are educational psychologists by profession. To differentiate the various roles they carry out, the term ‘case psychologist’ is sometimes used to describe the psychologist carrying the individual responsibility for working with a particular child and their family.
P1	Primary one, the first year of statutory schooling in Scotland.
P2	Primary two, the second year of statutory schooling in Scotland.
Partnership Nursery	To create sufficient pre-school places for children aged over three Scottish Local Education authorities sometimes enter into ‘partnership’ with private providers. The authority funds some places in these settings. The settings are expected to follow the national curriculum for this age group and be part of the usual inspection and quality control process.
IEP	Individualised Educational Programme. A document outlining a child with additional support needs learning targets, resources and support strategies.
ASP	Additional Support Plan. A document outlining factors giving rise to a child’s additional support needs, learning outcomes and ways of achieving these learning outcomes. Generally this type of planning framework would be used prior to an IEP being developed.
EWO	Education Welfare Officer

OT	Occupational Therapist
SALT	Speech and Language Therapist
Support Co-ordinator	A group of promoted teachers who manage and moderate the process for allocating additional support in mainstream schools.
Additional Support Needs	In Scotland this term has replaced the term 'Special Educational Needs'. It aims to offer a broader and more flexible approach to looking at the challenges children might experience that create barriers to their schooling.

Abstract

Working as an educational psychologist in a Scottish local authority the author shared concerns raised by her colleagues and education authority about delaying school entry, particularly for children with additional support needs. An argument put forward to justify delaying school entry was that children were too young to start school, particularly when considered in relation to the UK's international neighbours. The author carried out an initial literature review to establish what evidence there was of an 'optimal school starting age.' This review suggested that there was no one optimal age. Differences have been found in children's attainment and progress by age but these reduce as they move through primary school. In international studies a factor driving decisions to delay school entry is the models of school readiness held by parents and teachers. The author found very little research on delaying school entry in a UK context. International studies were found not to seek or include children's views. The empirical study therefore aimed to: explore how the decision making process for delaying school entry operated and if it was influenced by participants models of school readiness; develop and trial a methodology to capture delayed entry children's perspective and explore the experiences of these children and their families in nursery and during their first year of school. A qualitative case study approach was used to explore the decision making process for six children and their families and the experiences of five children and their families. Techniques from the mosaic methodology (Clark and Moss, 2001) were adapted to capture the children's voices. The study found that participants held different models of school readiness, in line with other international research, and this influenced their decision to retain. Participants reported a range of positive and negative outcomes of delayed school entry and identified factors that had been supportive in managing the children's transitions. Children's perspectives were captured and offered a unique insight into the children's views. In conclusion it is suggested that it is more helpful to adopt an interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach to school readiness. A moderated system is needed to support decision-making that also follows up longer-term outcomes. The methodology to gather children's views offered a way for children with additional support needs to express their own views, future applications of this are explored.

Chapter 1. Children Starting School: An Exploration of Issues Around Whether there is an 'Optimal' School Starting Age

Authors note

This piece of work was submitted as module 1 of the author's *Ded Psych* and was accepted as having reached doctoral standards in March 2009. It is included here to give the reader the context of the author's initial literature review. This acted as a starting point for the research questions and design of the rest of the study. It is presented separately from the rest of the thesis as it is a stand-alone piece of work that has already been 'passed' by external examiners. The main thesis being submitted for examination is outlined in chapters 2- 8 which follow on from this first chapter.

Introduction

The age that children should start school has become an area of increasing debate in the United Kingdom (UK). Internationally children generally start school between the ages of 5 and 7 (National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), 2007). The UK has one of the earliest school starting ages of between 4 and 5 years old. This varies between different parts of the UK.

Northern Ireland has the earliest school starting age of four years old (NFER, 2007) with the cut off date for school entry at the end of June (Menet, Eakin, Stuart & Rafferty, 2000). In England and Wales children are entitled to start school the term that they turn five and must attend school once they have turned five. In the author's previous experience of working for 10 years as an Educational Psychologist (EP) in England it is extremely rare for children to have their entry into school delayed. The

cut off date is usually the beginning of the school year (generally the first week in September). Due to a concern about the different lengths in schooling that this policy has previously produced, most children now start school in the September of the year that they turn five; although the first year is in a 'reception' class with a more play-based curriculum (NFER, 2007).

In Scotland where the author now works children have the oldest UK school starting age of between the ages of four and a half and five years. The cut off date is from the end of February in one year to the beginning of March in the next. Parents of children with January and February birthdays have a right to ask that their child's school entry be delayed and a free nursery place is automatically provided for an additional year (automatic deferral). Parents of children whose birthday falls between mid August and 31st December have a right to request that their child's school start is delayed. However, they need to provide supporting evidence for a request for funding for additional time in nursery, and a decision is made by the local authority as to whether this will be available (discretionary deferral). Many parents do choose to defer their child's entry, particularly for children with January and February birthdays. An article by Macmillan (2006) in Scotland on Sunday reported that in 2006 five hundred and four requests were made by parents in the author's local authority for their child's school entry to be delayed. This increased flexibility means that some children in Scotland are aged five and a half and older when they start school.

Wilson (2000) notes that research studies in an English and Welsh context have found that there appears to be a 'summer birthday effect' whereby children with summer birthdays (the youngest in any cohort) perform less well in school. He summarises the main findings from previous research as follows:

- The youngest summer born pupils (birthdays between May and August) have lower achievement levels than their older autumn born peers (September-December birthdays) (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob as cited in Wilson, 2000).

- Younger/summer born children were found in higher than would be predicted proportions in lower ability groups (Jackson, Jinks, Pidgeon & Thompson as cited in Wilson, 2000) or groups of children with special educational needs (Pumfrey, Peagam & Giles as cited in Wilson, 2000).
- Summer born children had poorer school attendance (Carroll as cited in Wilson, 2000).
- Summer born children scored less well than autumn born children in Standardised Assessment Tasks (SATs). (Sharp, Hutchison & Whetton as cited by Wilson, 2000)
- In some studies these effects were found to persist into 16 year old exam results and proportions of relatively younger children entering higher education (Hedger, Sharp, Massey, Elliott & Ross as cited in Wilson, 2000).

Wilson (2000) notes that some of the earlier debate has been about what causes this ‘summer birth penalty.’ In his paper he describes two possible reasons:

- Previously in many areas of the UK children did not start school until the term in which they turned five (anecdotal evidence suggests this continues to be the case in some parts of England). In these areas, it was therefore the case that summer born children actually had two terms less in school than their autumn born peers. Some of the studies discussed in this review aim to address the question of the impact of different lengths of initial schooling on children’s long term performance.
- A second possible cause that has been proposed is that the differences are due to ‘age position effect’. It is argued that differences in performance occur because summer born children are younger than their autumn born peers. Contained in this claim is a ‘maturational’ view of child development (Marshall, 2003) i.e. younger children are less mature than their older peers and therefore will perform less well in school.
- A third explanation is put forward by Lawlor, Clark, Ronalds and Leon (2006); these seasonal differences may arise because the developing foetus has been exposed to different temperatures, maternal diet or infections and this in turn has impacted on later brain development and performance in school.

With the introduction of both baseline and national testing public awareness of the standards that children attain at different ages has been raised and the standards children are achieving compared internationally. This sits alongside national targets for achievement set by the Labour government that have not always been met. Sharp (2002) notes that one of the reasons proposed as to why this might be the case has been linked to the idea of an optimal school starting age; maybe children in the UK are starting school when they are too young and this is affecting their subsequent achievement. She adds that this leads to an argument that European and other English-speaking countries' model of a later school start (average age is 6 in most countries, as late as 7 in some) is a better one.

As noted earlier, the author's own local area has one of the latest UK school starting ages and more flexibility about when a child does start school. Educational Psychologists (EPs) in the author's service find that they are often consulted by pre-school staff and parents about whether a child is 'ready' to start school and, in cases where a child will be five once the school year has started, EPs become closely involved in the decision making process as to whether the child would benefit from an additional year in nursery (referred to as retention). When asked to consider these issues EPs feel concerned about what information they should be taking into account when supporting parents and pre-school settings in making these decisions. In the author's local authority the progress of children whose school entry has been delayed is not formally tracked. Therefore a personal interest of the author was to find out about the impact of a further year in nursery on a child's progress.

This literature review has, therefore, been undertaken firstly to try and ascertain what evidence there is for an optimal school starting age. In looking at this issue the review has been widened beyond Wilson's (2000) review of research in the UK to look at the more recent research in this area and also at evidence from international practice where children start school later. Secondly, it aims to explore what the benefits and costs might be for children who start school at a later age and how EPs, parents and

pre-school staff judge whether a child is ‘ready’ to start school.

Literature Search Strategy

A search of the literature in this area was carried out to see what evidence there is of a ‘best’ or ‘optimal’ school starting age. The following data-bases were searched for papers published in this area:

- Australian Education Index
- British Education Index
- ERIC
- ASSIA
- Scopus

The following search terms were used, initially on their own:

- school starting age
- best school starting age
- optimal school starting age
- age of school entry
- age of kindergarten entry
- Retained school entry
- Delayed school entry
- Deferred school entry

and then with the following conjunctions:

- and attainment
- and cognitive skills
- and emotional and social development
- and emotional and behavioural development

A review of abstracts was carried out to establish which papers were pertinent to the

topic and full copies of these papers obtained. Relevant references from papers not identified in the initial search were also followed up. As a final trawl for information the search engine Google Scholar was used; individual searches were carried out on sites that had emerged as being relevant from the initial searches e.g. NFER and Scottish Government publications and research reports. Relevant authors with an on-going research interest in the area were also followed up. A total of 69 papers were retrieved and from these 36 papers were identified for discussion. Initially, with such a large number of papers identified, strict criteria had to be applied to reduce them to a manageable amount for discussion. The criteria applied were as follows:

- Paper must have been published in the last ten years (findings prior to this have already been summarised using the Wilson review and the aim was to look at the most recent research in both a UK and international context).
- Children involved in the research must either be receiving their education in an early years setting, in their first year of school or be part of a longer term follow-up based on the age that they started school.
- The main focus of the research must be on the impact of school starting age on the child's long term academic and/ or social and emotional development.
- Papers that focused solely on readiness were excluded; only those looking at readiness and impacts of delayed entry were included.

A key paper that emerged was by Stipek (2002). At the time of publication it reviewed a range of predominantly American research papers and took an educational perspective. Stipek notes that three main research methodologies have been employed in trying to decide the best age for children to enter more formal educational settings. These were as follows:

- 1) Studies that compare the outcomes for children across a year group by age.
- 2) Studies that compare the outcomes of children who are almost the same age but in different year groups or who are virtually a year apart in age but in the same year group.

- 3) Studies that compare the progress of children whose entry has been delayed with those who have entered at the earliest eligible point.

In the current review it was found that the same research methodologies continue to be employed subsequent to Stipek's paper across a range of international contexts. The search also uncovered a series of papers that took a slightly different economic perspective. Although these studies took a different perspective they still employed similar research methodologies in comparing children's performance by age and school start point. For the purposes of this review the information has been organised into sections based on whether the research occurred within the UK or beyond and which of the above research methodologies the authors have employed. The sections are structured so that they start with the wider international perspective, then focus on findings in a UK context and finally look at the author's Scottish context. Section 1 will discuss papers that compare children's performance across a year group, Section 2 will discuss papers that compare the outcomes of children who are almost the same age but in different year groups and those who are virtually a year apart in age but in the same year group, while Section 3 will look at the information arising from studies comparing the progress of children whose entry has been delayed and those who started at the earliest eligible point.

Section 1: Studies looking at variation in children's performance by age across a year group

Studies carried out in international contexts

This first set of papers looks at variation in children's progress by age across a whole age cohort in an international context. This research methodology explores the longer term impact of age of entry on a child's achievement, cognitive skills and social and emotional development. When discussing these international studies it should be borne in mind that these children are likely to have started school at an older age and to have been educated in a system where different pedagogies operate than do in the UK. However, it is interesting to note that the same debate as to whether the

country's school starting age is too young or too old and whether it should be moved to a different point exists. To help the reader gain an overview of the studies each group of papers has been organised into a table offering a summary with a more detailed discussion following. The main findings from the international papers looking at children's performance by age across a year group are summarised in Table 1-1**Error! Reference source not found..**

A wide review of papers in this area was carried out by Stipek in 2002. She discussed fourteen research papers using this kind of methodology; thirteen reported on studies carried out in the USA and one on a study carried out in Israel. Overall the evidence from these studies suggested that relatively older children had higher achievements than relatively younger children in the early stages of school; this effect became less evident over time. Most of the studies focused on attainment and IQ scores but four also looked at social, emotional, behavioural and motivational factors and here the findings were more mixed. An Israeli study (Breznitz & Teltsch cited in Stipek, 2002) found that younger children showed signs of increased anxiety but showed no age-related differences in terms of self esteem or sociometric measures. In another study that looked at teacher ratings it was found that relatively older children were rated as having better social skills and being more popular (Spitzer, Cupp & Parke cited in Stipek, 2002); however other related factors were not associated with age. In contrast to this, two other studies (Stipek & Byler 2001, Kinard and Rheinherz as cited in Stipek, 2002) did not find an impact of age on children's social, emotional and behavioural development using a range of measures. Stipek concluded that there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that relatively younger children are more vulnerable to social, emotional and motivational difficulties. The review papers described in this section support this conclusion. However, different conclusions emerge from more recent and UK studies, and these will be discussed later in this review. Stipek observed that most of the studies do not factor in confounding factors which might be affecting children's progress such as socioeconomic status and ethnic background of their parents. In the one study that did do this (Jones & Mandeville

Table 1-1. International studies looking at variation in performance across a year group.

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
Grissom (2000)	USA (California) data for all children tested in 1998-2002.	Performance on 2 standardised tests of younger and older children. Some delayed /retained children in sample.	Older children performed better than their younger peers. Differences were small and no longer evident at a High School level.
Stipek and Byler (2001)	USA 237 children in three schools from low income backgrounds. Longitudinal study .	Literacy and maths attainment, child's ratings of relationship with teacher, perception of their academic competence and teacher ratings of child socially and behaviourally .	Relatively older children achieved better initially but these differences were no longer evident in third grade. No significant differences were found in child or teacher ratings of social and emotional development or in relation to academic competence. Older children reported having a closer relationship with their teacher.
Stipek (2002)	Reviewed 14 papers (mainly US based research)	Asked is there an optimal age for starting Kindergarten? One section looked specifically at comparing variations in attainment, cognitive scores and social and emotional skills continuously by age.	Most studies found older children initially better attainments than younger children, but this decreased over the time they spent in school. A few studies found no differences. There was a small advantage of being relatively older this reduced over time. Some evidence that relatively younger children were more vulnerable to emotional and social difficulties. Socioeconomic factors were also included these factors had 13 times more impact than age.
Elder and Lubotsky (2006)	14,333 USA children from NCES National Educational Longitudinal study in 1988.	Age of kindergarten entry to attainment in maths, reading, grade progression and diagnosis of learning difficulties	Relatively older children 0.53 standard deviation better reading scores, 0.85 standard deviation better maths scores. Relatively younger children 13% more likely to be retained, diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Delayed entry from lower SES.
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2007)	Over 900 children in various parts of the USA.	Longitudinal study from birth to 3 rd grade. Attainment, cognitive skills, social and emotional development of younger and older children in a class, control for confounding factors	Found same 'modest' advantage for older children in a year group as Stipek (2002). Some of these effects persisted for older children. No differences found in social and emotional development of the younger and older children.
Dobkin and Ferreira (2007)	Data from 'Decennial Census Long Form Data' for the states of California and Texas	Effect of school entry laws on attainment and labour market outcomes.	Youngest children in a class were more likely to be held back a grade. Found no impact on later labour market outcomes of early school entry. Entry laws were poor instruments for making judgements on eventual incomes.

cited in Stipek, 2002), it was found that these factors were much more important in determining a child's eventual achievement than age. Stipek argued that since younger children eventually catch up with their older peers they are learning at a faster rate and potentially benefiting more from school. However, she contradicts her argument with regard to the application of this methodology:

“Few of the studies using this methodology assess change in achievement over the school year; they therefore cannot be used to determine whether older children benefit relatively more from schooling than do younger children.” (Stipek, 2002, p.5)

It can be argued that the reverse of this argument applies to the younger group.

Stipek's (2002) approach is mainly a discussion of findings rather than a critique of each paper. The predominantly American context of these papers where children start school at an older age (6 years for first grade) makes it harder to compare and extrapolate these findings to a UK context. From Stipek's discussion it was also evident that in the USA parents often delay their child's entry and this has an impact on the data used in the studies discussed. This review, therefore, offers a good starting point for the consideration of optimal school starting age but may have less application in the UK setting.

Further and more recent studies also report on children's achievement in an American context and how this varied by age (Grissom, 2000; Elder & Lubotsky, 2006; Dobkin & Ferrareira, 2007). All these studies used secondary data collected from large population surveys. Grissom and Elder, and Lubotsky both found in line with Stipek's review that relatively older children had better achievements initially but this effect reduced over time. In addition, Elder and Lubotsky reported that relatively younger children are 13% more likely to be retained and 3% more likely to be diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). They also found that children coming from higher socioeconomic

backgrounds show a greater accumulation of skills prior to kindergarten entry. They suggest the evidence showed that having relatively older peers increased younger children's attainments but also made them more vulnerable to repeating a grade in the future. This pattern was also reflected in Dobkin and Ferrareira's (2007) seemingly contradictory finding that the younger children were more likely to be held back a grade but also that the youngest in a cohort had slightly higher academic attainments than their older peers. In the United Kingdom it is very unusual for children to be held back in the same way as in the USA. However, there is evidence from some of the UK studies that the younger children in a class are more at risk of being incorrectly 'labelled' as having Additional Support Needs by their teachers and it is possible that this is part of the effect here, in this USA sample. A younger child may appear to lack certain skills, but this could be related to their relative maturity as opposed to an intrinsic difficulty in this area. Elder and Lubotsky, and Dobkin and Ferrara are discussion rather than peer reviewed empirical papers so we can not be fully confident that their findings and methodology have been thoroughly scrutinized. Grissom's paper is peer reviewed, but the findings should be considered against the different context and policies of the UK. For example in the USA many children have their entry delayed or repeat a grade. In his own discussion, Grissom acknowledges that this will have had some impact on the results, and because the data is secondary in nature the exact reasons behind any decision to delay are not known.

Using the wider international context Bedard and Dhuey (2006) carried out an analysis of secondary data from the "Trends in Mathematics and Science Study" (TIMMS) based on data from the following countries; Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, France Greece, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain and Sweden. They reported that they had chosen these countries because they all have clear school entry cut off dates. However, as detailed in the earlier discussion of school starting ages in the UK, this is actually not the case for England and that is likely to have an impact on the overall results. They found that the youngest children score 4-12 percentiles lower than the oldest in Grade 4 and 2-9 percentiles lower in Grade 8. They also used a different secondary data set

from the USA and Canada to demonstrate that younger children in a cohort are less likely to move on to further and higher education. They use these two sets of data to argue that age effects do not dissipate over time and that differences are due to the ‘relative immaturity’ of younger children. However, despite a range of different statistical approaches being applied to their data to factor in and out various effects, they do not at any point report on the statistical significance of the differences they find. A look at the raw data does show that the effect reduces over time, as reported in other studies, and a test of statistical significance would be useful to confirm or refute the importance of this finding. Finally, inclusion of such a wide range of countries also affects the data, as a range of school starting ages operate and it would appear from their analysis that they have not factored in the impact that different lengths of schooling have on children’s attainments.

The studies discussed so far have been cross sectional in nature and have compared performance by age across a cohort. The difficulty with this research methodology, as highlighted by Stipek (2002), is that it only tells us about children’s achievements at one point in time; it does not tell us how this varies for each individual over time. Longitudinal studies offer the opportunity to look more closely at this individual variation. This literature survey identified two papers that report on longitudinal studies and these are discussed next.

The first by Stipek and Byler (2001) was a longitudinal study of 237 children from kindergarten to third grade. All the children came from low income families with a representative ethnic mix, and their maths, literacy, social skills, self and teacher perceptions were measured each year by individual assessment, interview and teacher questionnaire. As regards attainments a similar pattern of better attainment initially for the relatively older children was found but this effect was no longer evident in third grade. When they compared similarly aged children in kindergarten and first grade they found that the first graders’ mathematical achievement was better than the kindergartens’ with no effect for literacy. They argue, therefore, that there are more benefits to be gained for younger children in school than at home. No significant

differences are found in self perception or teacher ratings of academic competence and social skills except that the relatively older children reported that they were more confident that their teacher liked them. Five children whose entry had been delayed were not included in the analysis. As this study stops at third grade, it does not identify any later age of entry effects that might emerge such as a reduced likelihood of enrolling for further education in the relatively younger group. The focus here is on children from low-income families (Stipek and Byler justify this focus as looking at the area of greatest concern for policy makers) but it could be argued that a different pattern of results would be evident for children from higher income families, as these children may have greater gains from spending more time prior to school learning at home.

The second paper, by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (2007), reported on a longitudinal study carried out with 900 children from birth to third grade. Within the sample they reported that they included a representational number of children from different ethnic, social and family backgrounds and controlled for this in their data analysis. Data was collected using interviews with mothers and teachers, teacher ratings of social skills and progress, formal standardised tests of literacy and cognitive skills, the Achenbach behavioural checklist and a social skills questionnaire and rating system with testing occurring in kindergarten and each year of school. Overall they found, in line with Stipek (2002), that relatively older children made better progress initially than their younger peers but the size of this effect reduced over time. However, their findings differed from Stipek (2002) in that this effect is still significant in grade three and there is evidence from some of the test scores that the older children did make more progress and therefore potentially got more out of school than their younger peers. This is despite evidence that some of the younger children had higher test scores initially in some areas of literacy. However they note that:

“...the associations detected are modest and would not appear to justify the strength with which beliefs about age and maturity dominate many, if not all,

discussions about readiness for school (Meisels, 1999). Moreover it remains unclear what policy implications would derive from these results, as there will always be children within a class who vary in terms of their age of entry to school.” (NICHD, 2007, para 62)

They found no differences in social, emotional and behavioural development by age either at the start of school or once they reach third grade. They suggest that age of entry should only be given some limited weighting when considering a child's readiness for school and that other factors such as the type of parenting the child receives, the level to which the parents are able to support their education and the economic situation of their family hold a greater weighting.

The information offered in the NICHD study appears to be fairly robust in nature since confounding factors, such as ethnic and socio economic background, not taken into account in other studies are factored in here and the longitudinal nature of the study means that an individual's progress over time is also considered. However, with respect to a UK context it should be borne in mind that the children in this study will have entered school at an older age than here. Although these findings may hold true for five and six year olds in the USA, they do not consider the four year olds who enter formal educational settings in the UK. In addition, a different pre-school system operates in the UK than the USA. One of the reasons that Stipek (2002) gives for not increasing the age of entry into kindergarten is that for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds high quality pre-school may not be available. In the UK a system has now been in place for some time to ensure that all three to five year olds have free access to high-quality pre-school education.

As can be seen, findings predominantly from an American setting suggest that at the early stages of school there does appear to be an initial academic and possibly social advantage for relatively older children, but this effect reduces over time and is less evident two or three years into school. Where other factors such as socio-economic background, ethnicity and parental education levels are taken into account, these

have more weighting in the eventual outcomes for a child than the age at which they started school.

Studies carried out in the UK or comparing a UK sample with an international one

This second set of papers looks at variation in attainment, cognitive scores, examination results, and emotional and behavioural development by age across a whole age cohort in the United Kingdom context. An initial look at the UK literature suggests that there is conflicting evidence in support of the argument that younger children have lower attainments and are more likely to have additional support needs in school. However, when the research methods and type of data used are considered more closely alongside the different times the studies were carried out in relation to policy change, a slightly clearer picture begins to emerge. These papers are summarised in Table 1-2.

Daniels, Shorrocks-Taylor and Redfern (2000) addressed the issue of whether different lengths of schooling offer an explanation for the performances of summer and autumn born children. They used Standardised Achievement Test (SATs) results from children in 1991 and 1992 to look at whether summer born/younger children do better when they have an additional two terms in primary school. This difference occurred due to varying admission policies operating in different parts of England; some summer born children entered school at the same time as their autumn born peers, some had one or two terms less in school. They also factored in the impact of gender and social background. Overall they concluded that increased length of schooling did not mean that the younger children made any significantly better progress. Social background and gender emerged as more important factors. They suggested this may be due to maturational factors (younger children are not ready for formal learning) or that the curriculum available in a school classroom is not appropriate for younger children. Looking at how they have analysed the data it would appear that they are considering

background, length of schooling and gender simultaneously rather than looking at each effect separately.

In their discussion of the results they noted that social background effects outweigh length of schooling. This study was conducted before several new educational approaches were introduced in England; foundation stage curriculum (DfEE¹, 2000) and national literacy (DfEE, 1997) and numeracy strategies (DfEE, 1998). The foundation stage curriculum particularly aimed to adjust the curriculum so that it was more appropriate to the needs of this younger group of children. To decide whether increased length of schooling is beneficial for summer born children, similar data from a more recent period would need to be considered. This question will be revisited in the next section.

The importance of length of school is also considered by Hutchison and Sharp (1999) who used a similar method but with different data. The data that they compared were raw scores from the Suffolk Reading test administered to 6, 8 and 10 year olds in 1988 and the same cohort in 1990. The results were compared on the basis of season of birth. They again found summer born children performed less well than their autumn born peers. This effect was evident at all ages and was statistically significant at ages 6, 8 and 10 but not at 12. They do not indicate what admission policy was operating in this area during the period, so it is not clear from their paper whether length of schooling could be a factor. In addition they do not quote or carry out any analysis of the age standardised scores and therefore do not fully explore what the data they have collected might show. Standardised scores would help to see whether the differences in performance are simply what we would expect when we take into account the variation of age within each group.

Standardised test results are used to tease the issues out further by Ford and Gledhill (2002). They took existing data from a survey carried out in 1999 as part of a study of

¹ Department for Education and Employment

Table 1-2. UK Studies looking at variation in performance across a year group.

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
Alton and Massey (1998)	All English, Welsh and Northern Irish pupils taking GCSE, GCEs (A Levels) in 1991, 1993, 1974, 1975.	Grades achieved in GCSE and A'level by month of birth. Number going on to take A' levels, by month of birth.	Younger pupils took fewer GCSEs and achieved poorer results than their older peers. Fewer summer-born pupils went on to take A'levels but for those who did there was no age related pattern in performance evident.
Hutchison and Sharp (1999)	7000 children in 59 schools in outer London Local Education Authority	Suffolk reading test data from 6,8,10 year olds in 1988 and same cohort in 1990. Mean performance by season of birth.	Autumn-born children performed significantly better than summer-born at all stages. Effect reduced over time; significant at ages 6,8, and 10 but no longer at age 12. Steep drop between 6 and 8 and at transfer to Secondary School.
Wilson (2000)	178 secondary age pupils classified as having SEN (roll 1225)	Looked at season of birth and gender against percentage of children who were identified as having SEN. And their scores on the 'cognitive abilities test. (cat)'	10% autumn born 16.6% spring born 16.5% summer born Found a higher incidence of SEN amongst the younger children and boys. Summer SEN children had higher cat scores than autumn born SEN children.
Daniels, Shorrocks, Taylor and Redfern (2000)	2500 children in 1991 & 1800 children in 1992	KS1 SATs results against season of birth, length of schooling, gender and social background.	Older children out-performed younger children. Summer born children did not seem to have increased benefits from an additional 1 or 2 terms in school. Gender and social background emerged as more important factors than season of birth.
Ford and Gledhill (2002)	1999 survey data from 8036 families in England, Scotland and Wales	Relationship between season of birth, incidence of SEN, IQ and reading and spelling attainment.	Children achieved in line with expectations of their age in reading and spelling with no higher incidence of specific learning difficulties. However teachers were more likely to rate summer born children as having SEN.
Sharp (2002)	British based, compares international papers	Comparison of papers on optimal school starting age.	Concluded mixed evidence for & against different school starting ages. Older children did better. Some evidence that starting school young increased a child's anxiety levels, reduced their self esteem & motivation to learn.

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
Goodman, Gledhills and Ford (2005)	1999 survey data from 8036 families in England, Scotland & Wales	Level of emotional and behavioural difficulties based on the strength and difficulties questionnaire.	Younger children in a year were more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural difficulties.
Tymms, Jones, Merzell, Henderson and Cowie (2005)	Scottish children (8,652) compared to English speaking children in England (65,258), Western Australia (10,630) and New Zealand.(5,870)	Used Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPs) data at school entry (baseline) and P3 to compare children's progress by relative age. Compared Scottish children's baseline scores to English, Australian and New Zealand children.	Older Scottish children achieved higher scores than younger children initially but this was no longer evident at P3 (there was a wide range of attainment at all ages). Scottish children had slightly lower scores at entry in English and Maths but the same scores in vocabulary as English, Australian and New Zealand children.
Lawlor, Clark Ronald and Leon (2006)	Scottish sample of 12,150 people born between 1950 and 1956.	Attainment at ages 7, 9 and 11 compared in relation to season of birth and climatic differences at the time.	At age 9 younger children had lower score than older children in reading. At age 11 younger children had lower scores than older children in maths. These differences were small overall. No variation was found in pictorial and verbal reasoning or minor behaviour disorders by season of birth. Temperature at time of conception, during mother's pregnancy and at birth did not affect intelligence. Authors suggested it is age of entry and relative age that is having an impact.

the mental health of children and adolescents in Britain. The data was collected in England, Wales and Scotland to examine the relationship between season of birth, incidence of Special Educational Needs, IQ and reading and spelling attainment. Using standardised scores they found that children were achieving in line with the expectations of their age for reading and spelling, with no higher incidence of specific learning difficulties. This finding is in interesting contrast to findings from the two previous studies that used SATs results and raw test data and found a statistically significant difference. Their data from teachers based on face to face interviews and self report questionnaires suggested that summer born children were more likely to be rated as having Special Educational Needs (although the data collected on SEN did not support this). This is a worrying finding given that it will lead teachers to have different expectations of these children, which in turn will have a potential impact on the child's achievement and self esteem in the longer term. Unfortunately, the authors do not seem to be aware of the different school starting ages of Scottish children. In Scotland the oldest children tend to have Spring/Summer birthdays and the younger Autumn/Winter birthdays. The authors do not seem to take this into account when putting together the groups for this data, so this omission may slant the results.

The question of whether younger children are more likely to be registered as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) is considered further by Wilson (2000), who compared season of birth, gender and cognitive scores against numbers on the school SEN register. He found that boys and younger children are more likely to be registered as having SEN, although the numbers for spring born were slightly higher than for summer born. He also compared the cognitive scores of children on the SEN register and found that, although younger children were more likely to be registered as having SEN, they had higher cognitive scores than their older SEN registered peers. This pattern of results suggests that, in line with the findings from Ford and Gledhill's (2002) study, there may be an element of negative labelling from teachers that affects judgements made about this younger group of children. Wilson notes that this concern is highlighted by Sharp, as cited in Wilson 2000, and Mortimore, as cited in Wilson

2000 in their papers on a similar subject. However, what Wilson does not analyse in this paper are the reasons for the children's SEN registration. If the children were registered because of concerns about their behaviour, their cognitive scores might be less relevant, as it may be that younger children are more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nor does he carry out any statistical analysis of the differences in the cognitive scores of the SEN registered children, so we cannot know from this paper whether this effect has occurred by chance. Information about the children's socio-economic backgrounds and length of schooling are not included in the analysis which may also have affected the results.

The question of whether younger children are more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural difficulties is explored further by Goodman, Gledhills and Ford (2005), who use the same survey data discussed in their 2002 paper. However, on this occasion they have separated out the data to take account of the different school cut off dates in Scotland. They compared a child's season of birth against data on prevalence of emotional and behavioural difficulties using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) completed by parents, teachers and the children themselves (from 11 onwards) and also some data from face to face interviews. They also set the Scottish data against the English and Welsh data to look at whether any differences were due to "season of birth" or "relative age." From this comparison they concluded that it is relative age not season of birth that cause differences between these groups. They found that younger children received higher difficulty scores on the SDQ suggesting that they were more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural difficulties than their older peers. They noted that this effect was small at an individual level but, added together, becomes more significant at a public health level. It could be argued that this difference in patterns of behaviour is linked to the children's relative immaturity as opposed to their having a greater degree of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Furthermore, there is a risk that biased expectations may influence the ratings given by teachers in the same way that Wilson (2000) and Ford and Gledhill (2002) suggest that teachers are more likely to rate children as having SEN without any supporting evidence. Direct observations of the child's behaviour in context

carried out by adults independent of the child and not aware of the children's SDQ scores would help to clarify the picture.

International findings are compared with those from a British context by Sharp (2002). She reviewed a range of UK and international studies and concluded that there is no definite evidence about the benefits of different school starting ages. Partly this is because it is hard to compare 'like with like,' as different pedagogies and approaches apply throughout. Her review suggested that teaching children formal skills early gives them an initial advantage, but this is not sustained in the longer term as later starters make rapid progress and catch up. She found some evidence that early exposure to a formal curriculum may make children more anxious and reduce their self esteem and motivation to learn. In an English and Welsh context, she found that older children in a year do better than younger ones even when different lengths of schooling were taken into account and she cited a further study by Hutchison and Sharp (1997) to support this. She identified important factors in creating an optimal early years environment and set this against some of the difficulties of the reception class environment (school based provision for children in their first year of school in England and Wales). Sharp does not discuss the Scottish context or the different system operating here. This review is mainly a summary and discussion of existing papers and does not critically evaluate the findings that emerge.

The papers discussed so far have focused on the impact of children's age on attainment, cognitive skills and social and emotional development in primary and the early stages of secondary school. Alton and Massey (1998) looked at whether there was a longer term impact of age and season of birth on General Certificate of Education (GCE) and Advanced (A) level results in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They used data for all children sitting these exams in 1974, 1975, 1991 and 1993 to analyse the grades achieved by season of birth. At GCE level they found that older children achieved higher grades and were more likely to go on to take 'A' levels. No age related pattern was found in 'A' level results and they suggested this was because only the higher performing younger children go on to take this exam. The

authors do not justify why they have chosen to discuss data from as far back as 1974 and 1975, given that a different exam structure was operating at this time (Ordinary Level and Certificate of Secondary Education) this data seems less relevant to current discussions. For both data sets the analysis of the data is descriptive, yet a more robust statistical analysis of the data would add weight to their arguments and would make it easier to compare these findings to other studies where more analysis has been applied. The authors also do not seem to take into account the different school cut off age operating in Northern Ireland, whereby some of the summer born children will actually be the oldest in a year group. As in the Ford and Gledhill (2002) study, this is likely to alter the overall picture.

Focusing more closely on our Scottish context, Lawlor et al. (2006) attempted to tease out the different hypotheses as to whether length of schooling, relative age and actual seasonal differences might affect brain development. They used retrospective data from 12,150 people born between 1950 and 1956 who took part in the Aberdeen Child Development study to look at attainment, IQ scores and teachers' ratings of minor behavioural disorders. This information was set alongside school admission policies and ambient temperatures at that time to see what relationships existed. They found that at age 9 younger children had lower scores than older children in reading. At age 11 the younger children had lower scores than older children in maths. These differences were small overall and not quite as predicted strictly by age as some of the younger children were in the higher scoring groups. No variation was found in pictorial and verbal reasoning or minor behaviour disorders by season of birth. Temperature at time of conception, during mother's pregnancy and at birth did not affect intelligence. The authors suggested it is age of entry and relative age that is having an impact rather than season of birth. The data set that they chose to analyse measured the effects of pedagogies and approaches that are likely to differ markedly from those used currently in Scotland. Today children's progress is much more regularly assessed at entry (baseline) and as they move through school through national tests. Therefore, more contemporary studies are likely to produce a clearer picture of the development in children's achievement over time. Finally, only one

aspect of the likely impact of seasonal variation on brain development is discussed in this paper (ambient temperature) the other factors of maternal diet and infection are not explored making it impossible to completely rule out this hypothesis as a possible explanation.

A further analysis of Scottish data is offered by Tymms, Jones, Merzell, Henderson and Cowie (2005) this study looked at age, cognitive development and progress from school entry to the third year of primary for a sample of Scottish children. They compared Scottish children's developmental profile at school entry to that of children in England, Western Australia and New Zealand (they only look at English speaking children here to achieve a like for like comparison). They conclude by asking whether there is evidence of an optimal school starting age in Scotland. The data derives from the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPs) project which used a computerised baseline assessment on school entry and is repeated later in school. In the Scottish context they found a wide variation in age and attainment at school entry, from exceptional to struggling with most parts of the assessment. In line with other studies they find girls are ahead of boys in reading and vocabulary but about the same in maths. Children on free school meals had lower starting points. Older children achieved higher initial scores than younger ones, but this effect was no longer significant in P3. They found some older P3s were doing significantly less well than their peers and they suggest that these are probably ones who have had their school entry delayed due to concerns about their development prior to school. They found that length of pre-school experience was not significantly linked to baseline scores. They suggested that this might be because the generally older Scottish children have all had quite a bit of pre-school experience in line with the recent national policy of giving all children a free pre-school place from the term after they turn three. From comparison of the progress of younger and older children they concluded that there does not appear to be an optimal school starting age. They suggested that the policy should not be changed without further supporting evidence and that it is an area where strong opinions are held without confirmation from a research base.

With respect to international comparisons Tymms et al. (2005) found that Scottish children overall have slightly lower scores than the other three countries in reading and maths but the same scores in vocabulary at school entry. They suggested this might be due to differences in the type of pre-school curriculum on offer and proposed that further research in this area would be useful. When considering these results it should be borne in mind that the Scottish sample is likely to be older than the English and Welsh ones as a later school cut off date is in place and there is more flexibility in the school starting age. This suggests that in this case younger children are showing better baseline scores than older children. This paper is of particular pertinence as it looks at the Scottish context and compares it internationally. However, the authors do not cite or link their findings to any of the other research studies. The paper's focus is on cognitive/ attainment outcomes although in their recommendations for further research they do suggest looking at the social and emotional factors. It does not offer any analysis as to whether the Scottish children 'catch up' with the other English speaking countries at a later stage. This would seem to be an important next step in a Scottish Government-sponsored report that aims to provide guidance on decisions about the school starting age. However, they finish by suggesting that a way forward would be to adopt an evidence-based approach and introduce pilot projects where the impact of different school starting ages could be evaluated in a controlled way.

As can be seen from this section UK studies have found an initial advantage for the relatively older children in a school cohort; some went on to find this reduced over time, while others did not. This may partly be due to the type of data they were using to measure changes in attainment and also the time scale of the data collection . One study found that younger children do less well at a secondary and further education level. There appears to be increased teacher labelling of relatively younger children in a cohort as having Additional Support Needs when this is not confirmed by evidence from other assessments of their skills. One study found that younger children are at increased risk of having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In Scotland, when TIMMS data was used children appeared to have a lower starting point in literacy and numeracy skills than their younger English and Welsh peers. In the

Scottish sample the younger children were found to have lower initial attainments but this gap was no longer evident three years into school. Studies where length of schooling and other factors are teased out begin to suggest that it is ‘relative age’ rather than ‘actual’ age which produces these different initial patterns of attainment.

Section 2: Studies that compare the performance of children who are almost a year apart in age but in the same year group, or children virtually the same age but in different year groups

This third set of papers compares the progress of children who are virtually a year apart in age but in the same year group and/or children who are virtually the same age but in different year groups. Stipek (2002) describes this as the most powerful methodology for resolving the optimal school starting age debate, as this approach allows the different impacts of age of entry and length of schooling to be considered.

Studies carried out in an International Context

The main findings from international studies using this kind of methodology are summarised in Table 1-3. A review of papers in this area was carried out by Stipek (2002); she described eight North American research papers using this kind of methodology. She noted that most of the studies found that length of schooling has a greater impact on a child’s progress than the age at which they start school. She quotes two main studies to support this:

- Cahan and Davis (cited in Stipek, 2002), found that one year in school has twice the effect of one year in age.
- Crone and Whitehurst (cited in Stipek, 2002), found that one year in school explains 62% of progress in literacy skills in the first year of school and 81% in the second.

The other papers reviewed by Stipek also showed that there were some cognitive areas where development did seem to be more age related: conversation skills, two out of

Table 1-3. International Studies comparing the performance of children virtually a year apart in age but in the same year group, or children virtually the same age but in different year groups

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
Fredrickson and Ockert (2000)	Swedish administrative data for everyone born 1935-84.	Compared long- term outcomes of children who are only one month apart in age but one year apart in terms of when they started school	Older children had better attainments than younger children and stayed on at school longer. Younger children had better earnings in the long term because they entered the labour market sooner.
Stipek (2002)	8 North American papers and some of author's own research in a USA context.	Aimed to find from the review of papers if there is an optimal age for starting Kindergarten.	Concluded that increased time in school leads to greater gains than simply being older when you start school. Actual age was found to be important for some cognitive competencies; conservation tasks, two out of five figural tests, use of pronouns and story production and recall.
Puhani and Weber (2005)	6, 591 German school children and 1,199 adults	Attainment of children who started school at 6 and 7 respectively using Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data.	Older children achieved 0.42 standard deviation better attainments than younger children and spent an additional 6 months at secondary school.
<i>Kawaguchi (2006)</i>	<i>Data from Japanese employment status survey, 259,756 males and 267,838 females</i>	Statistical comparison of attainment and eventual earnings of youngest and oldest children in a cohort. Retrospective data of adults aged 25-60.	Younger children had lower average educational attainment than older children. There was no impact of age of school entry on earnings. Looked at particular cohort where there was a low birth rate due to superstition and concluded that it was relative age (how old child is in relation to others in their class) not absolute age (actual age of child) that had an impact.
Hamari (2007)	Hungarian population, 4,508 observations for reading (PIRLS) in 2001, 3,222 observations for maths from TIMMS in 2003 at a grade 4 level.	Attainment of youngest and oldest children in a school year.	Older children in a year group had better levels of attainment than younger ones. Authors argued that you have to weigh this relative advantage against the negative impact that starting school later has on increased child care costs for a family (mother returning to work later and older children entering the labour market later).

five figural tests, use of pronouns and story production and recall skills. Stipek's approach to this review was discursive rather than critical. It should be noted that the sample sizes in four of the studies were relatively small, ranging from 20 to 79. Also readers from a UK context should be wary of how possible it is to apply these findings to a UK context with its different pedagogies and school starting ages.

A discussion paper that takes an economic perspective (Fredrickson and Ockert, 2000) directly contradicts Stipek's conclusions. In their study they used secondary data from a large sample of the Swedish population to compare the progress of children one month apart in age but one year apart in schooling (the school starting age in Sweden is 7). They reported that the older children in the sample had better attainments and stayed on at school longer. They also argued that children from families with a 'weaker educational tradition' had more to gain from starting school later and that it was absolute age rather than relative maturity which impacted on children's progress in school. The arguments and analysis in this paper are based on a dense statistical analysis of a large secondary data set and the paper is not peer reviewed. This makes it difficult for someone without an economic background to make full sense of it. Many of the claims seem to be based on a complex statistical analysis, and the retrospective and cross sectional nature of the data makes it difficult to be confident in the claims made. Passing reference is also made to the changing levels of child care available to children before they formally start school and how this has altered over time. However, how this impacts on the overall results is not discussed and the authors do not indicate how they have taken account of this in their data analysis. It could be the quality and nature of the child care available prior to school that is having an impact here. It is possible that this kind of curriculum is more suitable for children of a younger age than the Swedish school curriculum and hence the older children have had more time to benefit from this.

The literature search revealed further discussion papers taking an economic perspective by Puhani and Weber (2005), Kawaguchi (2006) and Hamari (2007). These compared the progress of the very oldest and youngest children in a cohort in Germany, Japan and Hungary respectively. Large secondary data sets were used to carry out this comparison. In line with the studies discussed in Section 1 there was an overall finding that the older children in a cohort made better progress than the younger ones. In addition they found that this effect persisted in terms of how long a child then spends in further education. It should be noted that this is partially due to different policies operating in these countries, whereby children need to complete a set number of years of schooling before they can leave. This is in contrast to the UK and USA where children leave school when they reach a set age and if they reach this age sooner they can leave before their education is complete. Fredrickson and Ockert (2000) and Hamari (2007) noted that the cost of later school entry means that the individual enters the labour market later and therefore earns less overall. Kawaguchi (2006) looked at the impact of a cohort with fewer births against overall attainment and argued, in contrast to Fredrickson and Ockert, that it is relative age not absolute maturity that caused these differences in attainment. The lack of peer review of these papers and difficulties in making direct comparisons with the UK context should be borne in mind when trying to extrapolate these findings. The data that these authors all draw from is survey data collected for a different purpose that only gives a cross-sectional snapshot. A longitudinal study that collects data directly in relation to the questions being explored would offer a stronger base from which to make these arguments .

It can be seen from this section that relatively older children have an initial advantage over their younger peers in the wider international settings covered by these papers. This effect is evident when children start school at an older age than in the UK. Whether this effect persists in the longer term is less clear, and the papers differ in their findings. They identify an economic impact of children starting school later, both on their families and on the child's later earning potential. The debate about

whether the differences are due to ‘relative’ or ‘actual’ age is explored but not finally settled.

Studies carried out in the UK or comparing a UK sample with an international one, from 1998 onwards

This fourth set of papers compares the progress of children who are virtually a year apart in age but in the same year group and/or children who are virtually a year apart in age but in different year groups in a UK context. They are summarised in Table 1-4.

In Northern Ireland different school cut-off dates exist and Menet, Eakin, Stuart and Rafferty (2002) use this to compare the progress of the youngest and oldest children in a school year. The Northern Irish school cut-off date falls in the middle of the summer (children with May/June birthdays are the youngest and those with July/August birthdays are the oldest) so this also allowed them to explore the hypothesis that the differences were linked to the season when the child was born. Children entered school at one set starting point, so age of entry and length of schooling are also controlled. The measures they used are assessments of literacy in Years 1, 3 and 5 (reading and spelling), a teacher-completed behaviour questionnaire and an analysis of referrals to psychological services. For all three years tested they found that the youngest children achieved lower scores in literacy than their older peers and were perceived by their teachers as having a higher incidence of behavioural difficulties. The perceived incidence of behavioural difficulties was highest in year one with teachers rating this group as being less able to concentrate, follow rules and instructions and work without direct teacher support, but it continued to be significant in years 3 and 5. With respect to referrals to psychological services they found that the youngest children were more likely to be referred than the oldest ones (significant at $p < 0.05$ level). They concluded from this study that the differences in performance of older and younger children were linked to their age in relation to their peers rather than their season of birth, as the oldest and best performing in the sample have summer birthdays. This difference was evident despite all children having started school at the same point and therefore

Table 1-4. UK studies comparing the performance of children virtually a year apart in age but in the same year group and/ or virtually the same age but in different year groups

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
Menet, Eakin, Stuart and Rafferty (2000)	Northern Ireland 108 pupils taking part in school based assessments and 695 psychological service referrals.	Compares performance of youngest (May/June birthdays) and oldest (July/August birthdays) on measures of literacy, behaviour questionnaire and referrals to psychological services	Younger group performed less well than the older group on measures of literacy and behaviour. Younger children had a higher referral rate to psychological services. Concluded that it is relative age not season of birth that is the important factor here.
<i>Keaney, Doherty, Johnstone, Malone, Miller and Young (2006)</i>	<i>Data from 896 Scottish children</i>	Longitudinal study, compares scores of youngest and oldest children in P2, P5 and S1.	Younger children had lower reading ages at every stage, statistically significant in P2.
Crawford, Dearden, Meghir (2007)	All children in England born between 1985 and 1998	Compares attainments of the youngest and oldest children in a year group by looking at their Foundation Stage profile SATS and GCSE results, admissions policy in their area, free school meals and statementing levels.	Youngest children did significantly less well than their older peers at all stages in school. Most evident at school entry but persisted into exam results at 16. Younger children who entered school at the same time as their older peers did better than children of the same age who had less time in school.

having had the same length of schooling. So in relation to the three possible explanations for the differences presented in the introduction they argued that these differences occur due to 'age position' effect or 'relative age,' as it is referred to in some other studies. It should be borne in mind that the overall sample size used in this study was relatively small, compared with many of the other studies discussed, and its cross sectional nature means that we cannot be sure that some of the differences found occur due to factors not controlled for, e.g. different teaching approaches to literacy being used with the different cohorts. The behavioural measures used rely solely on teacher ratings. An independent observation would be useful in confirming whether the children concerned actually exhibit different behaviours. The impact of this finding raises some concern, as it will affect how the children are treated by the teacher and possibly affect their self-esteem in the long term. One of the remedial strategies recommended is flexibility as to when these younger children start school. Such a system exists in Scotland, and further research in this area would help in exploring the impact of this approach.

In a study based on the English system Crawford, Dearden and Meghir (2007) looked at Foundation Stage Profile (assessment of children at the age of 5) SATs and GCSE results for the oldest and youngest English children in a cohort born between 1985 and 1998. They looked at the data in relation to the attainments of August- (the youngest children in the English system) and September- (the oldest children in the English system) born children, the admissions policy operating in their area, eligibility for free school meals, statementing levels (i.e. those with very significant special educational needs) and less severe SEN. They found that children with August birthdays did significantly less well on all measures throughout their time in school than their September born peers. This difference is most evident when children started school but persisted into exam results at age 16. They also found that August born children were less likely to stay on into further education and were slightly more likely to be statemented or have less severe SEN (this effect was smaller). They found that children with August birthdays had better outcomes in areas where a single point entry

system operated, i.e. they entered school in September in any session alongside their older peers (the disadvantage of an August birthday still remained for these children). They propose that this August ‘birth penalty’ arises because August born children sit the SATs when they are 11 months younger than their September born peers and accordingly perform less well. They recommend a number of possible policy changes that could counter this effect:

- Age normalize SATs tests. When they model this on the existing data they find that the young-for-year effect is no longer evident. This is an interesting finding when compared with that of Ford and Gledhill (2002) who found no differences between the groups when age standardized scores were used.
- Introduce greater flexibility as to when children sit SATs and base targets on what children are expected to achieve at a given age rather than at a set point in the school year. This kind of system already operates to some extent in Scotland, since teachers decide when to put a child forward for a National Test rather than all children sitting the test at the same time, as occurs in England. The literature search did not reveal any Scottish studies focusing on this and it is an area that would merit further study.
- Fund free nursery places for rising 3’s so that they have the same amount of time in nursery as their September born peers. In the current system children only start in nursery the term that they turn 3, so even if the youngest children start school at the same point they still risk being disadvantaged with respect to the length of their nursery education. However, in contrast to this Tymms et al. (2005) found that the length of time in pre-school education is not linked to a child’s baseline scores in Scotland.
- Introduce greater flexibility as to school starting ages so that younger children can choose to defer school for a year. As was outlined in the introduction, Scottish parents of relatively younger children do have the right to defer their child’s school start if they have not yet turned five when the school session starts. This literature search did not reveal any Scottish studies tracking the long term progress of this deferred group of children, although anecdotal evidence from my practice as an Educational Psychologist suggests that parents and teachers both view it positively. Tymms et al.

(2005) found some much older P3 children in their study who were doing significantly less well than their peers. They suggest that these are children who are likely to have had their school entry delayed because of earlier concerns about their development. The authors suggest that this would need to be accompanied by an increase in funding for full time nursery places for deferred children, as parents from less prosperous backgrounds might otherwise choose not to defer. This would be hard to justify politically, given that the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2005) found no advantages in terms of later attainment for children who have attended nursery on a full time basis as compared to those attending part time:

- Make teachers aware of the issues for younger children. They also note a need for research to look at the kind of curriculum/approaches that are effective for this younger group. The EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2005) gives some guidance which the authors do not refer to.
- Consider holding children back if they have not met the standards at a key stage. There are dangers in holding children back, and these are discussed in a later section.

A large sample was used in this study and this makes the data appear quite robust. However, it takes a very statistical approach that looks only at attainment and the main aim of the paper appears to be to address the question “How can we try to improve SATs results against targets set by the government not being reached?” Other studies reviewed here also look at emotional and social factors and these may be more important than cognitive factors in determining adjustment to school. This measure also needs to be taken into account when considering the impact of being the youngest in a year.

Focusing more closely on the local Scottish context, Keaney, Doherty, Johnstone, Malone, Miller and Young (2006) carried out a longitudinal study in North Glasgow which tracked children’s reading and spelling age from the first year in primary school through to the first year in secondary school. They compared the scores of the youngest (January/February birthdays) with the oldest (March/April birthdays) in P2,

P5 and S1 (the reason for this restriction was not given). They found the younger children had lower reading ages at every stage and that this difference was statistically significant in P2. The study only used raw test scores rather than age standardised scores and it would have been interesting to see whether these differences still existed when that aspect was taken into account. If, as is the case in Ford and Gledhill (2002) study, these differences are no longer evident, it could be argued that the children are making the progress that would be expected for a child of their age. They suggest that EPs should promote the idea of an additional year in nursery. To fully support this suggestion they need to demonstrate that children's literacy progress once in school is improved by an additional year in nursery, but no evidence is offered in support of this. As noted earlier, this literature search has not revealed any Scottish studies tracking the long term progress of children who have had their school entry delayed, so we cannot be sure of the potential benefits of this approach. Evidence from the Tymms et al. (2005) study showed that a slightly older population of Scottish children entered school with lower baseline scores than their younger English and Welsh counterparts. This would suggest that simply being older might not help improve these children's literacy attainments once they start school.

In this review it is again seen that younger children initially achieve less well than their older peers. This effect does reduce over time but was still found to be evident at a secondary school level by Crawford and Dearden (2007). Menet et al. (2000) found that the 'season of birth' hypothesis does not explain the differences in their Northern Irish data set and argue that it is relative age that is producing the difference in attainments. Crawford and Dearden (2007) also endorse the relative age hypothesis as an explanation. Length of schooling is found to be having some effect on the different patterns of attainment in younger English children but does not offer a full explanation of the differences. Keaney et al. (2006) argued that delaying children's school entry would improve overall literacy attainment but they do not offer any direct evidence in support of this.

Section 3: Studies that compare the performance of children whose school entry has been delayed with those who have started at the usual entry point

This final section looks at research on the impact of delaying children's entry into school. Stipek (2002) warns that this dataset is the most difficult from which to draw definitive conclusions about optimal entry age, as the reasons behind such a delay are often not known and may have an impact on the child's later attainment. For example, it may be the case that a child's school entry is delayed because there are already concerns about his/her development and this in turn could mean that s/he will perform less well in school. The literature search did not reveal any studies carried out in a UK context that compare the progress of children who enter school at the earliest entry point and those who have had their school entry delayed and spend additional time in a nursery setting. The author's own experience as a practitioner suggests that this practice is relatively uncommon in England (in 10 years working as an Educational Psychologist in Hampshire, Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire the author was involved in one case where it was agreed the child concerned would have an additional year in nursery) so this may be a reason for the lack of research from an English context. However, it is in more widespread use in Scotland where children's school entry is often delayed (e.g. figure of 504 deferrals in the author's local authority in 2006) and psychologists in the author's service are involved in a number of retentions each year (analysis from the service database suggests that EPs in the service were involved in 29 retentions over the past two years). Therefore, it is surprising to find that no research has been carried out in a Scottish context to explore this aspect. One paper by Hannah and Myant (2004) discusses research by Sharp 2002 and applies the outcomes of this to identify implications for a Scottish context. These implications are outlined in the summary at the end of this section. The papers discussed in the next section are therefore all based on international studies. The main findings from these papers are summarised in Table 1-5.

Table 1-5. International studies comparing children whose school entry is delayed or who are retained at a Kindergarten stage (usually aged 5-6) with those who started school at the usual entry point

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2000)	United States of America statistics from the 1993 and 1995 National Household Education Survey.	Explores the characteristics and later performance of children whose entry into kindergarten is delayed and children retained in kindergarten for an additional year.	Delayed group-more likely to be male, relatively younger than their classmates and non-Hispanic. Retained group-more likely to be male with a diagnosed developmental delay. Delayed group - less negative feedback from teachers with less concerns about their learning in relation to their same age peers. Retained group - lower performance than their same aged peers, more difficulty with concentrating, felt to be not learning up to their capabilities. When demographic factors were controlled for, the differences were still significant with the 1993 data but not the 1995 data.
Graue and DiPerna (2000)	United States of America 47 school districts, 8,595 pupils.	Performance on reading test & later need for special educational needs services by school enrolment status; early entry, normal promotion, retained kindergarten, retained in grades 1-3, delayed entry into kindergarten.	Delayed entry performed on a par with normally promoted peers, retained children performed less well than same age peers. Also the case for those with summer birthdays. Both delayed and retained children required more special education services than normally promoted peers. Authors argued that delayed and retained entry meant that children missed out on accessing the special educational services they needed - a 'theft of opportunity.'
Katz (2000)	United States of America	Review of existing research.	In NCES survey 9% children had their entry delayed each year in the USA. Offered an initial advantage, but effect reduced over time. Increased likelihood that children drop out of school before the end of High School. A higher incidence of behavioural problems in the delayed group.
Stipek (2002)	United States of America	Review of research papers to answer the question 'At what age should children enter kindergarten?'	No significant differences found between delayed, retained and normal entry peers. Higher incidence of later behavioural difficulties found in delayed and retained group.
Liddell and Rae (2001)	Longitudinal study of 150 pupils in 3 South African schools.	Tries to identify factors that will predict subsequent retention.	Best single predictor was children's academic achievement at the end of first grade.
Guevermont, Roos and Brownell (2001)	Data from a health data base in Manitoba, Canada	Looks at characteristics of retained students ,whether grade 3 retention improves later academic performance and High School withdrawal rates.	Males who were relatively young for their grade were most likely to be retained.1:4 retainees improved their performance after a year of being retained.Retained children are three times more likely to drop out of High School early.

Reference	Sample	Comparison	Consequences of Age of Entry
Marshall (2003)	Review of existing US research.	Aims to identify the assumptions behind parents and teacher's decisions to retain and delay school entry, looks at what the long term impact might be.	Two different assumptions exist about children's readiness; 'maturationist' assumption and 'interactionist' assumption. Those who hold a maturationist view are more likely to recommend delay or retention. The maturationist assumption is faulty but widely held: delaying a child's entry to school may inadvertently deprive them of opportunities that they need.
Wils (2004)	Mozambique-data from ministry of education's population census in 1997, exact Nr not specified. (official age of entry is 6 years but some children start as late as 11)	Relationship between age of entry and amount of time spent in school and whether pupil completes all possible grades.	Children who enter school later are less likely to complete all of their education: Age of entry % completing all education 5-7 yrs 95% 8-10yrs 55% 11-14yrs 2%
March (2005)	United States of America, Natural experiment 352 children	Reading and maths scores for age appropriate, young and academically red-shirted (school entry delayed).	Initially the red shirted group showed higher maths and reading scores but these differences were not statistically significant. In grade 4 red shirted group achieved significantly higher reading scores than the young group.
Malone, West, Flanagan and Park (2006).	USA, data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) sample of 21000 children entering kindergarten in Autumn 1998.	Aimed to establish prevalence of delayed entry and kindergarten repeaters, looked at differences between delayed and repeating children and compared their reading and maths scores..	5% repeating kindergarten, 6% delayed entry, 2% early entry, 88% 'on time.' Kindergarten repeaters usually male, had diagnosed developmental delay by the end of grade 1, come from a poorer family & have parents with less high school education. Delayed entry usually male, white, parents with bachelor's degree. Repeating kindergartners had lower maths & reading scores, delayed group had better reading scores but lower maths scores. Data modelling suggested retained children would have gained more from moving with peers .
Datar (2006)	Same ECLS data listed above.	Uses different statistical manipulation, 'instrumental variable approach' to look at impact of delaying deferring entry.	Children starting kindergarten 1 year later scored 5.4 points higher in maths & 4.6 points higher in reading. Older entrants gained 0.52 points more in maths and 0.89 points more in reading during their first two years in school. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and disabled children gained more from having their entry delayed.
McEwan and Shapiro (2008)	Administrative data for Chilean students	Impact of delayed school entry on later likelihood of being retained in grade 1.	1 year delay in entry decreased the probability of being retained in grade 1 by 2 %. Increased 4 th and 8 th grade scores by 0.3 of a standard deviation. Largest effect for boys. Those delayed beyond age of 6.92 years showed a greater likelihood of being retained in 1st grade and lower test scores.

Two different groups of children who experienced delayed school entry emerged from these research reports. One group started school one year later than the earliest possible school starting age, usually as a result of a parental choice to delay their school entry. In the American research this is referred to as ‘academic red shirting’ or sometimes ‘delayed entry’ (in Scotland it is described as ‘deferral’). To avoid confusion and ease of comparison of the papers the term ‘delayed entry’ will be used throughout when discussing this group of children. The second group are those who have spent an additional year in a pre-school/early school context; this generally seems to be based on the recommendation of the school and/or failure to achieve set test scores. Again, several terms are used to describe this group of children: ‘retained’, ‘repeat kindergarteners.’ In these cases the term ‘retained’ will be used throughout when discussing these papers.

From the table it is evident that much of the research has been carried out in a North American context (9 studies). The remaining three studies report on research that has taken place in developing countries (South Africa, Chile and Mozambique). For ease of comparison two further sub sections of ‘North American Studies’ and ‘studies from other international contexts’ have been created.

North American Studies

Most of the research around delayed entry and retention at a kindergarten stage has been carried out in North America (ten out of the twelve papers in the above table). From the author’s reading of these research papers it would appear that the practice of delayed entry and retention has been in place for some time in North America and is widely debated. To aid comparison these studies will be discussed as a group. Reviews of existing research papers are offered by Katz (2000) and Stipek (2002) and most of these are included in this table (the others pre-date 1998). They conclude that any positive impact of delay or retention is short lived and that there is a higher likelihood of early high school drop-out and an increased incidence of behavioural problems.

These two papers are mainly descriptive rather than critical in nature. They referred solely to data from the USA where a different structure of schools and pedagogy exists. From the author's reading of these papers it would appear that children can only move to the next year group if they have achieved a certain score on tests. So the process of delay and retention is a common experience for many children and families. This is in direct contrast to the UK where children move through the different stages in education based on their age rather than performance.

The different characteristics and outcomes of delayed and retained children are explored by a National Center for Statistics Survey (2000). This survey was carried out in 1993 and 1995 and is based on data from all American households. Delayed entry children were found to be usually male, Caucasian and relatively younger, whereas the retained group, while also generally male, showed later evidence of developmental delay. Delayed entry children seemed to show better outcomes with less teacher concerns about their learning in relation to their same age peers. The retained group had more difficulty in concentrating and showed lower performance than their younger peers. This is a secondary American data set, which means that we can only draw tentative conclusions. The data is based on teacher reports rather than any direct data on the children's performance such as reading and maths scores. Such direct data would help in confirming or refuting these findings.

Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarteners (ECLS-K) is used by Malone, West, Flanagan and Park (2006) to look at: the prevalence of kindergarten delay and retention, how the characteristics of these children vary, the relationship between a child's enrolment status and their first grade reading and maths attainments. The survey looked at a representative sample of 21,000 children across the USA who entered kindergarten in Autumn 1998 and has tracked the performance of this group to date. In their sample they found that 5% of children were retained, 6% delayed and 88% entered kindergarten on time (the remaining 2% were early entry). They found that both delayed and retained children were more likely to be male. However, differences also emerged between the two groups in line with the NCES (2000)

survey. The delayed children were more likely to be white and have parents with a Bachelors degree or higher level of qualification and less likely to have attended pre-school. The retained group were more likely to be diagnosed with developmental delay by the end of grade 1 and have parents with less than a high school education. In terms of later progress the retained children had lower maths and reading scores by the end of grade 1 in relation to their peers who entered kindergarten on time. The delayed children had better reading scores but lower maths scores than their peers who entered kindergarten on time. The authors went on to argue that the reason given for retention, ‘that it will allow children to catch up with their peers’, is not supported by the evidence. Stipek (2002) suggested that this initial advantage in learning for relatively older children will probably even out later on in school. Unfortunately the authors have not used this rich longitudinal data set to check whether this is the case with this sample. Nor did they look at the impact of delay and retention on children’s social and emotional development yet, as noted earlier, other studies argue that this is an important additional factor to take into account.

The same ECLS-K data set was used by Datar (2006) who took an economic perspective and focused on comparisons between the delayed and normal entry groups. She also compared the impact of delayed kindergarten entry on children with disabilities. The differences in performance between the normal entry and delayed groups were compared for the first two years of school. A different kind of statistical analysis of the data was applied using an instrumental variable approach that treats variation in Kindergarten entrance age and date of birth as exogenous variables. Datar concluded that delayed entry produced higher initial entry scores at kindergarten entrance and a steeper growth in test scores during the initial years of school for both typically developing and disabled groups. This is in contrast to the finding reported by Malone et al. (2006) where delayed entry children are found to have slightly lower maths scores than their normal entry peers. The two sets of authors did not discuss this difference in findings or cite each other in their references. This is probably because these papers were published in the same year so it is possible that the authors were not aware of each other’s findings, particularly as they are working from different

economic and educational perspectives. Datar's comparisons were carried out over the first two years of school whereas Malone et al. looked only at children's performance in the spring of first grade. It could therefore be argued that Datar's results give a better picture of performance over time. The parameters for judging 'disability' are not clearly defined by Datar and this would make it difficult for policy makers or practitioners to know exactly which kind of difficulties children were experiencing in order to benefit from delayed entry. Datar does not discuss differences in social and emotional development or children's performance beyond grade 3 (the time found by Stipek, 2002 to be when scores between the different groups even out).

The long term impact of delayed entry on children's later academic performance is considered by March (2005). In her longitudinal study she looked at the progress of 352 pupils in New York: 260 entered school at the normal age (5 years-5 years 8 months at Kindergarten entry), 60 entered early (4 years 9 months to 4 years 11 months at entry) and 32 had their entry delayed (5 years 9 months or older at entry). Comparisons were made between maths and reading scores in grades 2, 3, and 4, although the maths data set was a partial one, as only one school was able to contribute its scores. March found that the delayed entry group had slightly better average scores than both the age-appropriate and young group at all points in reading, but the only statistically significant difference was between the delayed group and young group's reading scores in grade 4. No statistically significant difference in performance was found between the groups in maths, and March argues that this suggests that delayed entry does not seem to offer any benefit in this curriculum area. March queries whether the better reading performance of the delayed group over their classmates might raise their self esteem and create a more positive attitude to school but these factors were not measured in this study. March highlighted a further potential negative impact of delayed entry:

"...suppose further research concludes that teachers (wittingly or unwittingly) step up the level of the curricular demands to meet the higher levels of cognitive and social maturity of red shirted students. This accelerated program may be

appropriate for red shirted students, but it is not the red-shirting itself that is causing the increased achievement, but rather the changes in curriculum. A potentially significant and negative effect of this up-graded curriculum, however, might be to jeopardize the heretofore success levels of age-appropriate students because they do not have the cognitive and social maturity to meet these new and accelerated instructional and behavioral demands.” (March 2005, para 15)

March makes a crucial point but unfortunately does not go on to propose how this potential change in curriculum could be evaluated with further research. Estimates from the papers discussed so far suggest that delayed entry students comprise 6-9% of a typical kindergarten class, whereas the age-appropriate group form around 88% of the class, if such a change is occurring it requires urgent investigation to protect the welfare of children entering school at the usual age. Overall, March’s research seems to suggest that delayed entry may give children some advantage in reading but not significantly so and this must be balanced against the risk that having older children in a class may cause teachers to adjust the curriculum to fit the learning of the delayed entry group to the possible detriment of the normal entry group. Longer term outcomes, such as whether delayed entry causes children to drop out of school earlier or develop more behavioural difficulties are not covered in this study but would have been worth further exploration.

A longer term follow up of children’s reading test scores and later need for special educational services of children by enrolment status is offered by Graue and DiPerna (2000). Their data was based on national test results for 8,595 pupils from 47 school districts. They found that those with delayed entry perform on a par with their same age peers and that this is even the case for those with summer birthdays (i.e the relatively younger children). There were more negative consequences for the retained group who were performing less well than their peers of the same age. Both the delayed and retained group showed an increased need for special educational services at a later age. The authors argued that delaying a child’s school entry means that they are being deprived of an opportunity to access the services they need early on and refer

to this process as a ‘theft of opportunity’ as opposed to a ‘gift of time’ that proponents of delayed entry represent it as. It is difficult to fully extrapolate these findings and apply them to a UK context where additional support need services are available at pre-school level and where delayed entry or retention is not frequently practised. In addition the authors only looked at the impact on reading and the later need for services. Factors such as achievement in other curriculum areas and the impact on children’s social and emotional development also need to be taken into account. Finally, the secondary nature of the data used means that the reasons behind a parent’s decision to delay are not known and these could be interacting with final outcomes. Perhaps the child’s development was already behind that of their peers, prompting the decision to delay school entry.

The characteristics of children who are retained and their later educational outcomes are explored by some studies. For example, Guevermont, Roos and Brownell (2001) used data from a national health database in Manitoba, Canada. Their data sample was from school start in Grade 1 where children are usually aged five. They found that boys who were relatively young for their grade were most likely to be retained. Of those who were retained only one in four improved their performance during their retained year, and in the long term retained children were found to be three times more likely to drop out of high school early. From this data they argued that retention increases rather than reduces children’s difficulties. The secondary nature of this data means that we do not know why these children were retained or what their experiences in their retained year were. It is difficult therefore to be sure if the outcomes would have been any different if they had not been retained. All the children studied were already in a school context so they experience their retention in a school setting, which makes comparison to a Scottish model where the retained year is spent in a nursery setting more difficult. However, the children’s age is approximately the same.

In trying to understand the process and impact of delay and retention we also need to explore the assumptions that underlie parents’ and schools’ decisions about whether a child is ‘ready’ to start school. Marshall (2003) reviewed existing research and looked

at these assumptions in more detail. From this she describes two common sets of school readiness assumptions made by parents and teachers:

- The ‘maturationist assumption’ is based on the view that readiness for school is based on a child’s abilities developing as they grow and mature almost along the lines of a biological time clock. This process is seen to occur without any influence from the outside; only time will help the child to reach the next stage in their development. This maturationist assumption underlies many of the arguments as to why children should start school at an older age or spend more time in a pre-school environment.
- The ‘interactionist assumption’ is based on psychological models of child development as described by Piaget (as cited in March, 2005) and Vygotsky (as cited in March, 2005). The interactionist assumption sees development occurring as a result of the child’s interactions with his/her environment. Vygotsky’s description of child development finds that there is a need for teaching and guidance from a more capable adult or peer to help the child reach the next stage in their thinking. Application of this model suggests that it is not the child that needs to be ready for school but the school that needs to be ready to guide and support the child from their current point of development to the next. This model argues that school readiness is not about ‘within child’ factors but instead about ‘ready schools.’

If we adopt the interactionist concept of readiness, the idea of an ‘optimal starting age’ is fundamentally challenged. Marshall described research carried out by Graue (as cited in March, 2005) which looked at how these different conceptions of readiness were evident in both schools’ and parents’ beliefs. Where a maturationist assumption was held by the staff of the kindergarten, more parents delayed their child’s school entry. Parents of the oldest and youngest children entering kindergarten were interviewed and it was found that they held maturationist beliefs when they described their conception of readiness. In her review of recent research papers Marshall concluded that this maturationist assumption is not supported by research findings, which suggest that any initial academic advantage of being older decreases over time. She quoted research by Stipek and Byler (2001), Morrison, Griffith and Alberts, Crone

and Whitehurst, Smith and Dow-Ehrensberger (as cited in Marshall, 2003) which indicated that schooling effects have more impact on the development of a child's skills than simply giving child additional time to mature. She concludes that families also need to be encouraged to consider the possible negative effects of delaying children's entry into school and the learning opportunities that they may miss out on as a result. The author would also argue that schools need to look at what stage each child they receive is at in their learning and development and support them in making their next steps as opposed to looking for specific within child signs of 'readiness.'

Marshall reported that she had applied strict criteria of validity and reliability to the papers included in this review. However, a descriptive rather than a critical approach is taken. The difficulty of extrapolating from an American context to a UK one remains an issue with these findings. The interactionist approach is a useful model to take, but it could still be argued that a UK pre-school setting offers a better learning environment for children of a certain age than a school one. The additional element of a suitable curriculum is not explored in this paper though the recommendation of a more flexible and adaptable school system is one we would share in the UK.

Studies from other international contexts

Some of the international research focuses on factors that predicate later retention. For example Liddell and Rae (2001) carried out a longitudinal study of 150 pupils in rural South Africa to try to identify these factors. The measures they looked at were academic achievement, nutritional status, parental education, socio-economic status, behavioural and cognitive scores. From all these factors the only emerging predictor was children's academic performance at the end of grade one. This study is interesting in its longitudinal design and the range of factors considered but it is difficult to extrapolate to our UK context. The children in this study started school at the age of eight with no pre-school experience and are educated in a system where retention is common (Liddell and Rae reported that 25% of South African children are retained at some point in their school career). One interesting factor is that starting

school at the much older age of eight did not seem to prevent many of these children suffering later educational difficulty.

The other international research focused on the longer term impact of experiencing delayed school entry or retention in an early years setting. McEwan and Shapiro (2008) used administrative data for children in Chile which gives exact dates of birth linked to administrative test scores for some children in fourth grade. They also draw on some data from the 1999 Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS). The authors used this data to estimate what the long term impact of delayed school entry might be. They concluded that a one year delay in school entry reduced the probability of repeating first grade and increased a delayed entry child's average test score by 0.3 of a standard deviation. They found this effect was larger for boys. However, a closer examination of the data and methods leads the author to question the reliability and validity of their findings. The data set is secondary in nature so we do not know the reasons behind a child's delayed entry and indeed this is predicted on the basis of date of birth alone not parental or school report. Test scores for only a subset of the original sample were known and therefore conclusions based on the entire sample cannot really be made. Children who, on the basis of their date of birth, looked as though they might have been retained were also excluded from the later analysis. TIMMS data only applied for one cohort of children and a different set of information was used from the other data. This will again distort the overall pattern of the results. Finally, the authors write from an economic perspective and although they make links to educational research this is done without specific or detailed references and broad assumptions are made. For example:

“Some psychologists argue that older children acquire greater “readiness” for learning, and can acquire skills more quickly.” (McEwan and Shapiro, 2006, p. 3)

A second study by Wils (2004) looked at long-term effects of delayed school entry and used data from a Mozambique Ministry of Education population census in 1997 to study the impact of age of school entry and how long a pupil remains in school. In

Mozambique the official school entry age is 6 years but in fact some children start school at age 5 and others as late as age 11. From the data set Wils compared age of school entry to length of time spent in education and whether children complete all possible grades. She found that those starting at an earlier point (5-7 years) completed all 8 grades, but those starting later spent less time in school overall and didn't complete all grades. Wils does not offer an exploration or explanation of why older children would drop out earlier. In fact if the length of time in school is added to the school starting age, all children appear to finish at age 12 or 13. In this developing world context this could suggest that it may be the 'pull' factors such as the need to contribute to the family income rather than the 'push' factors of school starting age that are affecting these results. It is therefore difficult to argue from this that it is school starting age alone that is having an impact. Wils acknowledged that the data set is patchy due to civil unrest and war so this makes it harder to draw a fuller conclusion.

As can be seen in this section, two distinct groups of children starting formal schooling at an older age emerge:

Delayed entry group

The delayed entry group are usually younger boys with better educated parents who decide that they will hold their child out of school for an additional year (NCES,2000). The motivation for this may be linked to maturationist beliefs about school readiness and/or the knowledge that older children in a year do slightly better academically than their younger peers. This group of children would seem to match Scottish children experiencing 'deferred' entry. It would be interesting to look at the characteristics of this Scottish group to see if a similar parental, age and gender profile emerges. In line with the patterns of advantage already identified for relatively older children earlier in the review, the delayed group do make faster progress in reading at an early stage and seem to be more confident in their relationship with their teachers. However, long term difficulties such as dropping out of secondary school earlier, late access to additional support needs services, an increased possibility of later behavioural difficulties and a

possible alteration to the curriculum delivered as the result of having much older children in the group are identified.

Retained group

The retained group are again usually boys but usually have parents with less education (NCES, 2000). They tend to receive a diagnosis of developmental delay later on in their school career but in a North American context miss out on receiving appropriate services early on because of their retention (Graue and DiPerna, 2000). For these children, having a retained year does not raise their academic performance to that of their younger peers. All studies find that retained children have lower reading and maths scores than their peers entering school at the usual time. It could be argued that this might still be the case had they entered school at the appropriate age. A study by Wu, West and Hughes (2008), not included in the above discussion because the children concerned were in first grade not kindergarten, challenges this. The authors compared the performance of matched pairs of children retained in Grade 1 and those identified for retention but who went on to the next grade. They find that this second group made better progress academically. The same long term risks of earlier high school drop-out, access to additional need support services and increased possibility of later behavioural difficulties apply to this group. This group of children would seem to match the group of children who are retained in a Scottish context. Given the range of negative impacts that have emerged from this review of the research it seems important to evaluate the impact of retention in Scotland.

As can be seen from the discussion above, part of the decision-making process behind whether a child should have their school entry delayed seems to be based on different models of 'school readiness' held by the range of adults involved with children.

Marshall (2003) described two of these as 'maturationist' and 'interactionist'. Those holding a maturationist perspective were more likely to favour delaying school entry. It would be useful to look at the arguments and models of readiness that are applied to decisions to delay children's school entry in a Scottish context. Hannah and Myant (2004) offered an overview of the UK and international research already discussed

earlier in this review. They then applied these findings to a Scottish context and suggested that there are three key problem areas for Educational Psychologists to research: establishing what the most effective early years curriculum is for the wide range of needs pupils have; identifying the most effective way to support the transition from pre-school settings to primary one; moving away from a 'within child' checklist method of identifying a child's readiness for school to a more contextually based assessment approach.

Discussion and Conclusions

From this review of papers it is apparent that all countries have a set school entry age, although flexibility varies as to how strictly this is applied and complied with. Inevitably this means that across a year group there is up to 11 months variation in children's age and this increases further in places where children's school entry is delayed or children are retained at a pre-school stage. When the progress of children is compared by age either continuously or by looking at the performance of the oldest and youngest children, the older children do generally seem to perform better initially, always in literacy and sometimes in maths. This effect is most evident when raw scores are used and may also explain children's differing performance on SATs. Findings vary as to how long this effect persists; some studies find it is no longer evident by the end of primary school whereas others find some impact at a further education level with younger children in a year group being less likely to continue on to university education. No matter at what age children start school, there is a continuing debate about whether this is too early or too late.

The findings about whether younger children are more vulnerable to social and emotional behavioural difficulties are more mixed. Some studies find no effect, whereas others find an impact. Where an impact is found, caution is needed in interpreting it, as often this is based on teacher/ parental ratings rather than direct observations of a child's behaviour. Some studies find that relatively younger children are more likely to be registered as having Special Educational Needs, referred to

Psychological Services or diagnosed as having ADHD. Again, this needs to be interpreted with caution since, when children's actual performance is looked at more closely, there are often other factors at play such as teacher bias and length of schooling.

Part of the debate about optimal school starting age seems to be driven by the fact that many parents and teachers hold strong beliefs about the importance of age in determining school readiness. This belief is challenged by studies that look at a range of other factors (such as socio-economic and/ or ethnic background of parents, length and quality of pre-school education, length of schooling) and find that these factors actually hold greater importance in determining the progress a child makes. Following up on these beliefs about the importance of age, different approaches to conceptualising school readiness emerge. In this review two are discussed: a maturationist and an interactionist model (Marshall, 2003). In debates about delaying children's school entry the maturationist argument is often presented. However, most of the papers reviewed here suggest that relatively older children consistently make better initial progress than their relatively younger peers whether the school starting age is 4 or 7 years, implying that age alone does not solely govern the progress children make in school. Based on this maturationist model adults hope that delaying a child's school entry or retaining them in an early years setting will maximise their later progress. Follow up of delayed entry children suggests that they make better progress initially but not always significantly so. The retained group do not appear to make better progress. Studies confirm that both delayed and retained children are at risk of leaving secondary education before their education is complete and could also be at more risk of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The interactionist approach offers a more effective model for conceptualising school readiness and shifts the emphasis from looking at 'within child' factors to more contextual model of 'ready schools' which looks instead at the adjustments schools need to make to receive children into their context.

In a UK context three hypotheses are presented as to why English and Welsh ‘summer born’ children consistently perform less well. These can be summarised as follows:

- Because they have experienced different lengths of schooling.
- Because they are relatively younger than their peers and therefore perform less well.
- Because being born in the summer or conceived in the autumn has had an impact on their brain/overall development.

Where younger children started school at the same time as their older peers, they made better progress than their same age counterparts who had less time in school (Crawford, Dearden & Meghir, 2007) but they still made slower progress than their relatively older peers. This would suggest that although length of schooling has some impact it does not explain all of the differences that occur. Lawlor et al. (2006) found that ambient temperature at the time of birth did not seem to have had an impact. In addition where summer born children were amongst the older ones in a cohort, as was the case in Northern Ireland and Scotland, they did have better achievements than their younger peers. Therefore, this hypothesis also does not seem to be supported by the evidence. The hypothesis that seems to carry most weight is that of ‘relative age’. The international studies reviewed here show that this effect is evident whether children start school at age 4 or at age 7. It seems to occur because of the way the school system is set up. It would, therefore, seem that there is no one optimal age for starting school but instead a variation in performance by age that may reduce by the end of primary school or possibly persist into higher education. Increasing or reducing the age that children start school is not likely to remove the effect but will shift it instead to a different group of children. It would seem, then, that we should be concern ourselves more with finding ways to reduce or support the relative age effect than hunting for an ‘optimal school starting age.’ In addition, March (2005) identified a potential unforeseen impact of delayed school entry on the curriculum presented to children and teacher expectations of the ‘age-appropriate’ element in a class. This difficulty does not seem to be acknowledged by proponents of delayed school entry.

Implications for Policy and Practice

From this review no one ‘optimal’ school starting age has emerged. Instead it is evident that, regardless of the age at which they start school, children who are relatively older in a year group generally make more progress than their younger peers initially but most studies found that this effect reduced over time. Other factors such as children’s pre-school experiences and parental background emerged as being more important determinants of a child’s later progress. When deciding if a child is ready to make the transition to school adults may adopt a ‘maturationist’ view and argue that more time is needed to allow the child to mature and ‘be ready’. Those working in this area need to be wary of this argument and ensure that any assessment and decision making process about a child’s readiness for school is widened out to take a more interactionist approach. This model helps practitioners and parents take into account the educational environment that the child is most likely to benefit from and how this can be adapted to support their unique needs. It places the emphasis on schools adjusting their systems and supports so that they are ready to receive and support children from the stage of development and learning they have reached. EPs, with their knowledge of child development and expertise in supporting educational settings in developing appropriate interventions, are in a strong position to meet this challenge and help educational settings and families in resolving any difficulties. It is important to explore both the benefits and possible negative consequences of delayed entry and how these will be addressed. When a child is presenting with additional support needs practitioners should consider all the possible factors impinging on this, including length of pre-school and school experience, the child’s age in relation to his/her peers and what expectations their teachers have of them. Teachers need to be made aware that in the early years of school, children’s performance may vary in relation to their age. They should take this into account when planning learning opportunities for the children in their class and making judgements about their progress, and social and emotional development. EPs have a role here in helping teachers conceptualise and understand the factors that are contributing to a child’s difficulties.

Implications for Future Research

Scotland is in a unique position within the UK as children start school at an older age than their English, Welsh and Northern Irish counterparts. Scottish parents have more flexibility in deciding when their child will start school. Many parents do choose to delay their child's school entry and psychologists are also involved in the process of retaining some older children in a nursery setting for a further year. However, this review has not found any direct research carried out in a Scottish context looking at the impact of this on children's later progress (the matter is briefly touched on by Tymms et al., 2005). Research from the USA suggests that the 'maturationist' argument that is applied to the benefits of delayed entry may be a faulty one and that there are negative factors associated with delayed and retained entry which need to be taken into account. This review suggests that children experiencing delayed entry do seem to make similar progress to the relatively older cohort in the class. The most negative consequences appear to be for the retained group who do not make accelerated progress as a result of their additional time in an early years setting and indeed on entry to school seem to make slower progress than their younger peers. In the author's authority EPs are directly involved in the decision making process for retention and this is the area that causes anxiety in the author's service. In terms of specific future research in the author's own context it therefore seems important to look more closely at retention. Some questions that have arisen from this literature review are:

- What information is used and what factors are taken into account when deciding whether a child will benefit from an additional retained year in nursery?
- How does this data fit with contemporary models of school readiness?
- What are the benefits and issues of an additional retained year in nursery in terms of:
 - progress the child makes both during their additional time in nursery and once they have started school?
 - social and emotional development of the child?
 - perceptions of the child?
 - perceptions of staff?

- perceptions of parents?
 - transition to the first year of primary school?
- Are there any particular groups of children who benefit from an additional retained year in nursery?
- What is the impact of retention further on in primary school and beyond?
- How can we develop a flexible and contextually appropriate way of assessing whether a child will be able to make a successful transition to school?
- What are the most effective ways of supporting the transition from pre-school settings to school for all children?

Work on the next modules will aim to address some of these questions in the author's local context.

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Chapter 2. Introduction To The Empirical Study

Context Of Study

This study was carried out in an urban local authority in Scotland. In 2008 the population of the city was 471, 650. Of this population 8,140 children were pre-school aged, 28,582 were primary school aged and 25, 297 were secondary school aged. In terms of pre-school provision this local authority had (at the time the study was carried out) 16 stand-alone nursery schools, 3 early years campuses, 75 nursery classes attached to primary schools (2 of which are attached to special schools) and 10 child and family centres. Approximately 39% of pre-school aged children in the city were in private partnership nursery provision. In addition to this, the local authority had 23 secondary schools, 91 primary schools and 14 special schools. Many children were educated in independent schools; this was the case for 13.9% of primary school aged children and 24.1% of secondary aged children. The author worked as an Educational Psychologist in this Scottish authority but prior to this she had worked in three English authorities. When she moved to working in Scotland she discovered that a different process operated around school entry than had been the case in England. Her interest in this topic coincided with it becoming an increased topic of debate in Scotland and a focus for her own local authority.

Internationally children generally start school between the ages of 5 and 7 (National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (2007). Most countries have set entry and cut off dates for starting school. These occur across a calendar year and mean that generally there is 11 months variation in children's ages across a school year (this variation increases in countries where it is common to delay school entry). The United Kingdom (UK) has the youngest school starting age of between 4 and 5 years old. This topic has been debated in the media with arguments being presented that this UK school starting age is too young in relation to that of our European counterparts (Coughlan, 2008; Paton, 2012).

In Scotland, primary one (P1) is a child's first year in school. The Scottish cut off dates for school entry are different from those in England and Wales, running from the end of February in one year to the beginning of March in the next. This means that at the start of P1, a child's age will typically vary between about four and a half and five and a half years. Legally a child does not need to attend school until the start of the school session after their fifth birthday. Uniquely in Scotland, in relation to the rest of the UK, parents of children who are not yet aged five when the school session starts can choose to delay their child's school entry until the session after they have turned five. In Scotland this is described as 'deferring school entry' or 'deferral'. A recent Growing up in Scotland report (Bradshaw, Hall, Hill, Mabelis, & Philo, 2012) suggested that 13% of Scottish parents choose to defer their child's entry, this was particularly the case for children with January and February birthdays² (almost half of the sample surveyed by Bradshaw et al.). Bradshaw et al. (2012) reported from their longitudinal data that at P1 entry 91% of children were aged between four and a half and five and a half (the typical school starting age) and 9% were older than this.

In the author's work in her local authority she and her colleagues play a key role in the process of considering whether a child who is aged five at the start of an academic year would benefit from an additional year in nursery (nursery retention) instead of moving to P1 with their peers. As a child of this age should legally be attending school at this stage, a more formal process exists for making this kind of decision. Children considered for nursery retention generally have complex additional support needs. At an early years group within psychological services, the author's colleagues expressed concerns about how the retention decision making process operated, and

² NB: For children with January and February birthdays, Scottish local authorities automatically provide funding for the child's additional year in nursery. However for children with mid-August to December birthdays this funding is given at the 'discretion' of the local authority. This is probably why it is a more common decision for parents of children with January and February birthdays.

what factors they should be taking into account when supporting families and early years staff in taking this decision, which will have long term consequences for the child concerned. A personal concern of the author based on her own experience of working in early years settings was that the decision to retain a child in nursery often felt like a way of delaying a more difficult decision about a child's long term educational future, rather than a route for the most effective support of a child's needs.

In 2007-2008 as a starting point for this research, the author carried out a literature review entitled 'Children starting school: An exploration of issues around whether there is an 'optimal' school starting age' (Gorton, 2009). In conducting this review the author specifically focused on 'optimal age', observing that, in her discussions with parents, educational staff and other professionals, they seemed to place a particular emphasis on the importance of age and indeed to hold a belief that a specific optimal school starting age exists. The argument that 4 or 5 is 'too young' seems to be on the national conscience, hence the media articles referred to earlier. This piece of work appears as chapter 1 in this thesis. The author reviewed 36 papers relating to international and UK research to look at some of the themes, debates and findings in this area.

In conducting this review the author found that whether countries operated a school starting age of 4 or 7 a 'relative age effect' emerges whereby children who are relatively older in a school year cohort initially achieve higher attainment levels than their younger peers. Many studies find this effect washes out 3 or 4 years into school (Hutchison & Sharp, 1999; Stipek 2002; Stipek & Byler 2001; Grissom, 2004; Tymms, Jones, Merrell, Henderson & Cowie, 2005) but some find it can persist in the longer term and have an impact at a higher/further education level (Alton & Massey, 1998; Crawford, Dearden & Meghir, 2007). However, other factors such as ethnic background and socio-economic status of families are reported to have thirteen times more impact on a child's later educational outcomes than their age at school entry

(Stipek, 2002). Both of these findings appear to challenge the notion that an ‘optimal school starting age’ exists.

The literature review included research studies into delaying school entry, the characteristics of this group of children and the long-term impact that this decision has on them. When identifying papers for review, the author did not find any published papers in the area of delaying school entry from a UK and more specifically Scottish context. However, more recently in May 2012 the Growing up in Scotland study (Bradshaw et al., 2012) published a report describing some data in this area, and in the author’s work on this doctorate, one of her supervisors shared an unpublished report of work she had carried out in a Scottish Local Authority (Hannah & Myant, 2002). The main body of research had been carried out in North America (9 research papers in the author’s initial review). Researchers claim that there appear to be two distinct groups of children who have their entry to formal schooling delayed. Some of these children are reported to have their school entry delayed by parental choice (delayed entry group), whereas others are held back on the advice of education staff (retained group) (Katz, 2000; Malone, West, Flanagan & Park, 2006; National Centre for Educational Statistics, 2000; Stipek, 2002). Children in these two groups have different characteristics and longer term outcomes. Exploring the reasons behind delaying school entry, research studies suggest that this process is influenced by models of school readiness held by parents and professionals. Those holding a ‘maturationist’ (Carlton & Winsler, 1998) perspective on school readiness are more likely to favour delaying school entry, whereas those holding an ‘interactionist’ (Meisels, 1998) perspective are less likely to support delaying school entry (March, 2005; Marshall, 2003). Exploring parents’ and practitioners’ reasoning behind this decision, research in North America has found that those who support the idea of delaying school entry argue that it offers a ‘gift of time’ (Graue & DiPerna, 2000) for children to mature or catch-up. However, Graue, Kroeger and Brown (2002) found in their later research that delaying school entry can represent a ‘theft of opportunity’, with children not accessing the support and assessment they would otherwise receive had they moved on to school with their age cohort. Some research studies find that

this decision can have a long term negative impact, with children who have their school entry delayed dropping out of secondary school earlier, and being at greater risk of social and emotional difficulties at a secondary stage (Guevermont, Roos & Brownell, 2001; Stipek, 2002; Wils, 2004).

Finally, the author found from her literature review that studies had gathered the views of parents and professionals on delaying school entry and experiences of preschool and school. However, the perspective of the child seemed not to have been ascertained or reported.

Research Questions

From the author's practice as an educational psychologist, the questions posed by her colleagues and local authority, and her initial literature review, a decision was reached to carry out research in the area of nursery retentions. The research would focus on the decision-making process and the influence on this of models of school readiness. A longitudinal follow-up of some retained children would be carried out and methods of gathering children's perspectives developed and used. The following research questions were developed to guide this process:

Decision Making Process for Retentions

- How does the decision making process for retentions operate in this local authority?
- What information does everyone take into account during this process?
- How does the data fit with contemporary models of school readiness?

Experiences of retained year in nursery and into P1

- What are staff and parent perspectives of the child's additional year in nursery in terms of:
 - The progress the child makes both during their retained year in nursery and once they start school with respect to:
 - Social and emotional development

- Skills acquired, particularly in areas where additional needs were identified
- Perceived positive experiences/benefits of the retained year in nursery and P1
- Perceived negative experiences/issues of the retained year in nursery and P1
- The child's transition to the first and second years of primary school?

Capturing the children's views

- How can the children's views and experiences be captured during their retained and P1 year?
- What are the children's views and experiences of their nursery and P1 environments?

Chapter 3. Literature Review

Contemporary Models Of School Readiness

From the author's initial literature review it was evident that decisions to delay a child's school entry were influenced by adult perceptions of whether a child is 'ready' to start school. In this chapter a further literature review on this topic is carried out to allow for comparison of case study data against the research base. In locating relevant research the author found that much of this came from a North American context. Increased research in this area seemed partly to be related to a set of national government education goals set in the USA in 1990. The first of these stated that by the year 2000 all children would enter school 'ready to learn' (Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp, 1995). Debate about models of school readiness and ways of assessing it emerged as a result and have been further researched. A recently published report looking at the Scottish context of deferrals and school readiness (Bradshaw et al., 2012) has also been included.

Carlton and Winsler (1999) noted that, historically, ideas that lie behind the concept of school readiness were based on two assumptions; firstly the child must be at a stage of development where they can take on specific learning, and secondly they must be able to manage in a 'typical' classroom environment. The view that a child is 'ready to learn' once they have reached a certain stage of development, has been based on idealist/nativist child development theory (Gessell 1940, cited by Carlton & Winsler 1999) with proponents often using Piagetian stages of development (Donaldson 1978) as further evidence to support this assumption. This 'maturational/nativist' model of readiness suggested that children are ready to start school once they have reached a certain stage in their development and they need to be given time to mature and achieve this. Carlton and Winsler claimed that this model of readiness has dominated practitioners' recent thinking about school readiness, although it should be borne in mind that when making this claim they have referred to their own North American context. This maturational model of readiness does not sit

well alongside the current pedagogical approach and curriculum frameworks implemented by practitioners in the Scottish Education system - a Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004). This curriculum framework views learning as a lifelong process which starts at a pre-school stage and emphasises the importance of practitioners offering appropriate learning experiences to help children to achieve the curriculum's learning outcomes.

In his 1998 review paper, Meisels described other models of school readiness that have emerged over time. The 'empiricist/ environmental' model (Meisels, 1998) argued that school readiness can be measured by external signs, based on a child's cumulative knowledge and skills, driven by external conditions. In this model the skills can be taught but school readiness is an absolute state that must be reached before a child can be said to be ready to start school. Evidence of parents taking an empiricist view of their child's school readiness seemed to be apparent in the Bradshaw et al. (2012) longitudinal study of 14,000 children and their families in Scotland. Their Multivariate analysis of a range of data suggested that high parental perceived readiness scores were linked to children who demonstrated average or above average cognitive abilities and positive social and emotional development. However, the data used in the Bradshaw et al. study is solely based on parental reports and this mitigates against getting a full picture. Additionally, their readiness score appears to be based mainly on within child factors. To get a clearer overview of whether this North American model would fit in a UK/Scottish context it would have been helpful if they had also considered factors external to the child, the perspective of practitioners working in schools, the views of other professions and indeed those of the children themselves. Hannah and Myant (2002) looked at the perspective of pre-school head teachers in their study of retentions in Glasgow. They reported that 95% of respondents had recommended retention at some point and that the reasons for this centred predominantly on their concerns about a child's learning, speech and language development and immaturity. These responses again show a tendency to adopt a within-child empiricist model (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels, 1998) of school readiness.

In both these models school readiness is seen as a characteristic developmental stage or set of skills. Meisels (1998) and Carlton and Winsler (1999) have argued that if this model is correct, it should be possible to accurately measure school readiness and say when a child is ready to start school. Kagan et al. (1995) in reporting further on the national goals recommended that five dimensions should be considered when assessing readiness; *“physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches towards learning, language development, and cognition and general learning”* (Kagan et al 1995, p. 3-4). A range of assessments have been used and produced in an attempt to assess school readiness. Carlton and Winsler (1999) and Meisels (1998) reviewed a range of studies that have examined the utility of various standardised assessments that claimed to assess readiness. From this they concluded that assessments developed for this purpose have limited reliability and validity, do not always successfully measure the skills they purport to, and do not necessarily predict a child’s ability to develop skills in the longer term. They therefore challenge the validity of these models. However, Murray and Harrison (2011) claimed in their study that using the ‘Who am I’ tool with 104 children did identify some features in children’s skills prior to school that were predictive of their success in literacy and numeracy at the end of their first year. Most notably these were their vocabulary skills and their disposition towards learning. In considering Carlton and Winslers’ (1999) and Meisel’s (1998) reviews within a UK context, we also need to be sceptical of their North American roots and the very different educational system to which they apply. In America there is an inbuilt assessment process operating throughout the school system to decide if children can move on to the next stage of their education, whereas in the UK, children move through the school system based on their age and not on the learning they have achieved. In the author’s view there is a further issue in that, if we define school readiness only in these very specific within-child terms, there are likely to be some children (particularly those with additional support needs) who, using this kind of measure, may never be deemed ‘ready’ for school.

Carlton and Winsler (1999) additionally argued that if readiness is an ‘absolute state’, and the solution is to give children more time to mature, there should be some kind of viable alternative to help them become ready for school. One solution, commonly practiced by American parents, Carlton and Winsler claimed, is to delay the school entry of children who appear not to be ready to create the additional time needed to achieve this through maturation. Bradshaw et al. (2012) found in their longitudinal survey that when parents were asked their reasons for delaying their child’s school entry, 44% reported that they felt their child was ‘not ready’ and 32% reported that they were ‘not old enough.’ This would suggest that some Scottish parents may also be taking a maturationist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) on their child’s school readiness. However, as discussed in the author’s initial literature review, the evidence that delaying school entry is a successful way of improving readiness and later academic progress is limited. Additionally, there is some evidence of negative long-term consequences from delaying school entry (Stipek, 2002).

Carlton and Winsler (1999) described another response to this issue - the development of ‘transition classes’. These classes aim to support ‘un-ready’ children by focusing on helping them learn how to learn. They reviewed three other research studies in this area and concluded that these classes did not increase children’s readiness for school. Pagani, Larocque, Tremblay and Lapointe (2003) carried out similar research in Canada and found that junior kindergarten did not appear to have a positive effect on children’s pro social behaviour and emotional disorder scores. Carlton and Winsler (1999) suggested that children should be placed instead in an environment that will help them develop these skills:

“If the goal for kindergarten is to help children develop sufficient self-regulatory and learning skills to adjust well in a formal educational context then we should place (rather than avoid placing) youngsters in precisely these contexts” (Carlton and Winsler, page 349 para. 1).

However it should also be noted that some research studies do show that some forms of pre-school education can enhance children's early learning skills. Howes et al. (2007) and Mashburn et al. (2008) found that there were benefits for children from attending pre-kindergarten programmes. In the UK, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons & Siraj-Blatchford, 2004) a longitudinal study of the impact of different types of support on children's early development, reported that attending pre-school, as compared to no pre-school, attendance does enhance children's early development and help them to have more skills at school entry. These more recent findings would appear to challenge the assertion that Carlton and Winsler (1999) have made here. However this could stem from the different pedagogy existing between the specific example of 'transition classes' which they discuss, and different types of pre-school education that other research studies evaluate.

In response to increasing concern about these earlier models, Meisels (1998) reported in his review paper that a third 'social constructivist' model of readiness has emerged. This model rejected the idealist and empiricist perspectives and instead set school readiness in socio-cultural terms, building on Vygotskian ideas of child development (Vygotsky, 1986). Readiness in this model is conceptualised on the basis of school and community perspectives of readiness rather than a child's developmental stage. Studies that have looked at parent and educational staff's perceptions of school readiness would offer some support for the wider perspective of this model. For example, Graue et al. (2002) found that when parents reflected on why they had delayed their child's school entry they often relied on narratives of their own, and other family member's experiences of being 'young' in school and also identified features of the local kindergarten that were a concern (e.g. child being there for a full day when they still needed to sleep in the afternoon). In the author's view this model is problematic in its one-directional nature, and the range of diverse and possibly conflicting measures that a discussion of readiness perspectives using this model could produce. For example, Pitroszki, Botsko and Matthews (2001) found that parents and teachers placed different emphasis on the skills they felt a child needed at

school entry; parents felt basic knowledge was the most important feature but teachers felt it was less important than other factors. Coming to an agreement on what constitutes readiness using this one-directional model is therefore problematic.

On the basis of his review Meisels (1998) proposed a fourth interactionist model as a more effective way to conceptualise and assess readiness. This model is bi-directional, looking both at the skills and qualities that a child has, and the expectations and impact of their environment in further developing these. Carlton and Winsler (1998) noted that this model meshed well with contemporary socio-cultural (Vygotsky, 1986) and transactional models of child development (Ford and Lerner, 1992), where a child's development and skills are led by interactions in their environment with more skilled adults or peers. This theoretical perspective is also supported by evidence in the field of neurobiology, where the brain is increasingly shown to be a more plastic organ whose development is influenced by interactions in the child's environment (Curran, 2008). This model seems to make intuitive sense and has now been adopted by some subsequent researchers (Dockett & Perry, 2002, High 2008, Johnson & Buchanan, 2011, Stipek, 2002). Meisels' paper takes a theoretical stance, with less information as to how his model of readiness could be measured and applied to real life situations.

Dockett and Perry (2002) used an interactionist model (Meisels, 1998) to help conceptualise school readiness in their longitudinal starting school research project in Australia. They involved parents, teachers and children in gathering questionnaire, interview and focus group data. From this they identified a variety of categories that were used by participants when conceptualising school readiness; "*Knowledge, Adjustment, Skills, Disposition, Rules, Physical, Family issues and Educational Environment.*" (Dockett & Perry, 2002, p. 78)

These categories described a range of areas both related to within child factors but also factors about the family, community and school environment. There was also evidence of bi-directional effects. For example, in the 'family issues' category factors

were associated both with how the family itself operated but also with how they involved themselves with the school. In the author's view this does offer some support for Meisels' (1998) theoretical model. Dockett and Perry (2002) found that different stakeholders placed different emphasis on these categories. For example, both parents and teachers rated adjustment as being important, but they focused on different aspects of it. Young children placed the most emphasis on knowing the rules and the consequences of not following these. Dockett and Perry (2002) concluded from their data that parents, teachers and children held different conceptions of readiness and that it is important to take all of these into account. They concluded that an interactionist approach helped in achieving this. As this data has been drawn from and applied in an Australian context, it is less clear how well it would apply to the UK context of this study. Dockett and Perry (2002) argued that many readiness checklists are unrealistic and expect young children to be more competent than adults. Other researchers such as Piotrkowski, Botsko and Matthews (2001), and Johnson and Buchanan (2011) have looked at producing readiness assessments based on an interactionist model. Pianta, Cox, Taylor and Early (1999) have explored and developed a 'ready schools' framework. They argued that 'ready schools' should create links between families, schools and communities, make these connections **well before** children start school and do so with an appropriate level of intensity (direct personal contacts rather than sending out brochures etc.). In their surveys of kindergarten teachers' practices (Early, Pianta, Taylor & Cox, 2001; Pianta et al, 1999) found that some of these practices were applied but barriers also existed.

Graue et al. (2002) argued that readiness should be regarded as a resource from which to plan for further development rather than a reason for delaying a child's entry to school. Dockett and Perry (2002) suggested that labelling children as 'ready' or 'un ready' for school is not helpful and that we should look instead to supporting their transition more effectively. Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) adopt this approach in their manual of transition practices based on this concept and Kennedy, Cameron and Greene (2012) discuss how they have applied it to transition records and practices in London. In Scotland the 'early level' (first stage of learning) of the Curriculum for

Excellence (Scottish Executive 2004) bridges pre-school and P1, therefore the argument that a child is ‘not ready’ for the learning they are already experiencing in pre-school does not seem, to the author, to fit.

Overall, in the development of theoretical models of school readiness, there has been a shift in thinking from whether we should be judging if a child is ‘ready’ to start school to the idea that schools need to adapt and adjust to be ‘ready’ to receive the children from their local community (Dockett and Perry 2002, Meisels, 1998). For the author this conception of readiness fits better with her perspective as an educational psychologist, and Kennedy et al. (2012) share this view from their work in the same field. It answers concerns, outlined earlier, with the maturationist and empiricist models of school readiness. In the author’s view, we should not be using a one-directional within child model to judge whether children are ‘ready’ for school. Instead we should be looking at what stage they are at in their learning and development and adjusting the school environment so that it can support them from this point forward. Kennedy et al. applied these concepts to develop a transition and assessment record for children in the borough of Southwark that is used in partnership between families and settings. They reported that it has had a positive effect on children’s attendance and parental satisfaction. However, they only offer a description of this rather than presenting their direct analysis of the data so it is difficult to fully evaluate its impact.

Dockett and Perry (2002) further argued that current research studies of school readiness have not sought children’s views or investigated the importance of relationships. They have aimed at addressing this gap in their subsequent research in the area of transition (Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2011). Jadue-Roa and Whitebread (2012) also reported on how they have used methods based on interviewing and photographs to look at children’s perspectives on transition in Chile. In their article they draw from a single case study, so one cannot generalise beyond the immediate context. The problem of researchers and early educators not seeking children’s views was also identified by the author in her initial literature review and reinforced the

need to develop a way of obtaining the children's perspective, particularly those with complex additional support needs, as part of this research process.

In the author's view it seems that we are only just beginning to look at and discuss different definitions of readiness and how these in turn might impact on transition in a UK context. This was evident at a conference the author attended where findings from the Growing up in Scotland study were presented in May 2012. At this conference participants from a range of health, education and social work backgrounds in the audience were keen to share views about children starting school at age 4 and 5 and examine their concern that they were not 'ready' at this age. However, they seemed less aware of the notion of 'ready schools' which was brought back into focus by Dr. Christine Stephen in her summing up (GUS Annual Conference-findings from year 6, May 2012, p. 5). From an EP perspective Kennedy et al. (2012) similarly reported that in reviewing articles in key British Educational Psychology journals over the past decade (British Journal of Educational Psychology, Educational Psychology in Practice and Educational and Child Psychology) they found five research articles looking at the transition process and all these focused on primary to secondary transition rather than children's first transition to a formal /primary school setting.

Transitions From Early Years Settings To School

One of the research questions aimed at ascertaining teachers' and parents' perspectives of the children's transition experiences. Recent research into children making their first transition to school is therefore explored in this section.

The term transition has been interpreted in different ways by researchers. Galton, Gray and Ruddock (1999) differentiated between 'transition' as a process where pupils move between different classes in a school and 'transfer' as a move between different schools. Other researchers (Newman & Blackburn, 2002; Jindal-Snape, 2010) suggested the terms 'transition' and 'transfer' can be used interchangeably to describe any move that a child makes from one setting and series of relationships to

another. For the purposes of this piece of work the term transition will be used in the latter way.

Jindal-Snape (2010) noted that some researchers have conceptualised transition as a one-off event in a child's educational journey. Others have regarded it as a longer term process of adjustment from a setting with which a child has been very familiar to a new setting where they need to develop new relationships and adjust to a different learning environment (Jindal-Snape, 2010). Fabian (2007) noted that this process is likely to begin prior to the child making the actual move and then to continue throughout the move and beyond this. Researchers conceptualising transition in this latter way have regarded the process as completed once the child has fully adjusted to, and feels at home in their new setting. However, we must be wary of making a judgement of when/whether this has happened without gathering the child's perspective as well. This latter transition process fits well with the longitudinal nature of the case studies in this thesis, which intends to build on it further by also exploring parent, teacher and child views as the children make the transition to their second year of primary school.

Researchers have used various theoretical models to explore the transition process. Many have taken Bronfenbrenner's (2001) ecological approach to explore transitions. In this model a child's accommodation and adjustment is influenced by a series of interacting hierarchical layers or systems which include factors relevant to them as an individual (microsystem), their family or school (meso-system), their wider community or culture (exosystem) and their belief systems and social history (macrosystem) (Hannah, Gorton & Jindal-Snape, 2010). Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) emphasised the importance of the dynamic nature of transitions in an ecological model where the child at the centre of the process is influenced by multiple interactions between themselves, their peers, educational staff, family and neighbourhood. Fabian and Dunlop (2006) noted alternative theoretical perspectives taken by some researchers such as viewing transition as a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960, cited in Fabian and Dunlop 2006) or using 'life course theory' (Elder,

1998). In their article Stephen and Cope (2003a) used the social model of inclusion to explore children's experiences of starting school in Scotland. Crafter and Maunder (2012) advocated adopting a socio-cultural framework in their article and additionally claim that research has focused mainly on the outcomes of transition rather than the process of transition itself.

In contemporary Western society children may already have experienced several transitions in early-years educational settings before starting school. However, the move to school is a child's first step into compulsory education and therefore can be regarded as the first universal educational transition that children make. In making the transition to school children experience a range of major changes that they need to adapt to. These include changes in the physical environment of school, needing to develop more complex relationships with new peers and adults, experiencing a potentially different approach to learning and teaching, possibly having less parental support and engagement with the school and a greater child to adult ratio meaning that less individual adult attention is available for them (Brostrom, 2000, Deckert & Peaceman, 2006, Fabian, 2000, Taggart et al., 2006). None of these changes are unexpected, but research shows that the key participants in this process - the children themselves, their parents, pre-school and school staff - can hold different perspectives of the transition and this can impact on its outcomes (Dockett and Perry, 2005, Russell, 2005, Stephen and Cope, 2003a,b).

Children's perspectives

Einarsdottir (2007) reported on a range of international studies that gathered children's perspectives and concluded that children from many cultures regarded this step as moving away from the free choice and play they experienced in their pre-school settings to more formal academic work. Brostrom (2002) reported on Nordic studies where some children said they were worried that school would be a strict and authoritarian place that they would not enjoy. However, when Niesel and Griebel (2002) interviewed a sample of German school children, they all said they were

looking forward to school. Dockett and Perry (2002, 2005) gathered children's perspectives once they were in school, using interviews and digital cameras. They found that generally children reported that they felt 'happy' and 'excited' about starting school, though some also reported being 'scared'. The concerns that children expressed related to trying to make sense of school rules and routines. Margetts (2006) interviewed 54 children starting school in Australia and reported that children expressed common concerns about friendships, understanding school routines and procedures, feelings and teachers and the classroom. She reported that of particular concern were children's anxieties about being hurt in the playground. Stephen and Cope (2003 b) elicited children's views about starting school towards the end of their first year in school. They found that by this stage the children had difficulty recalling their early days in school and made comments like 'fine,' although children in their study consistently mentioned that it was important to have someone to play with. In Stephen and Cope's study it is possible that, at this stage in the school year, the children were settled and familiar with school and therefore perhaps no longer in the transition process. Children will settle in at different times and rates and, as noted earlier, adults need to be wary of making a judgement on this without also consulting the children themselves. When trying to assess children's perspective on their transition experiences and the settling in process it would be helpful to explore it on several different occasions in the school year and involve the children in the process. Optimal time points might be initially in the first few months of school, and then later on in the school year.

Parent's perspectives

A child starting school is a big step in a parent's life. Many cultures have special rituals or symbols associated with starting school, such as selecting a school bag or lunch box or shopping for uniform (Australia and UK). In Germany, children have a 'Schultüte', a sleep-over at their kindergarten followed by a ritual where they are 'thrown out' of kindergarten (Deckert-Peaceman, 2006). Parents have commented on the changing expectations of the school environment, and express concerns about who will take on the 'duty of care' for their child, communication between home and

school often being mediated by their child and supporting initial difficulties that some children have in separating from them (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Stephen & Cope, 2003a,b). Bradshaw et al.'s (2012) longitudinal study found that children who had had difficulty adjusting to pre-school were also reported by their parents to have difficulty in adjusting to P1. Unfortunately, the data collection methods they have used do not seem to capture information about whether any additional steps had been taken to support this transition more in light of this previous experience, or whether the schools concerned were aware of this problem.

The children in the author's current study had the added challenge of additional support needs that, as Dockett, Perry and Kearney (2011) and Taggart et al. (2006) found, can increase the risk of a child and their family experiencing a more difficult transition. Russell (2005) explored the perspectives of 19 families with disabled children in more detail using a longitudinal study and taking Brofenbrenner's (2001) ecological perspective. She found that parents' expectations of their child at the microsystem level and their role in supporting them were largely met over time. However, parents had mixed experiences at the mesosystem level in their expectations of people who would be supporting their child in school and their relationship with the school. It was at this level that many of their expectations were not met. In particular, they experienced confusion about communication with the school and which staff would be supporting their child. Hannah, Gorton and Jindal-Snape (2010) found that Scottish parents of children attending a mainstream primary school reported a similar experience of lack of communication and information from school in the early days. Data from both these studies was not triangulated with the perspectives of other stakeholders so the full picture is less evident. However, Russell's study offers a helpful comparison point for the data within this thesis since it takes a similar longitudinal case study approach and focuses on a group of children with additional support needs.

Teachers' perspectives

Research studies have found that teachers can hold very different perspectives from children and parents on transition. Dockett and Perry (2002) found that teachers most frequently mentioned a child's adjustment to the organisational and environmental aspects of school and then the child's independence skills. Dockett and Perry suggested that teachers place particular emphasis on the skills of adjusting to the school's environment and expectations, and on accepting personal responsibility. Stephen and Cope (2003 a,b) found a similar pattern when they looked at Scottish teachers' perspectives in a longitudinal follow-up of 27 children from pre-school settings to school. They found that teachers tended to place the children they received into school for the first time into four categories. These were: 'ideal' children; 'ready for school/ able to adjust'; 'taking time to adapt to the classroom'; 'having difficulty in the classroom' (Stephen & Cope, 2003 b, p.3). This finding seems to fit with Dockett and Perry's data and suggests there may be certain qualities that teachers look for in children as indicators of how well they will manage transition. Stephen and Cope also looked at the perspectives of pre-school teachers and found discontinuity in their perspectives of teachers in school. Pre-school teachers regarded pre-school as an educational stage in its own right and stressed the importance of the progress that children had made in the Scottish 3-5 framework (Scottish Government, 2008). However, school teachers focused less on the learning the children had achieved in pre-school and more on the skills they needed for the primary classroom. They reported that they often did not refer to the transition records and reports received from the pre-school setting.

Stephen and Cope (2003a) found that teachers saw transition to school as a one way process where the child needed to adapt to the nature of the school rather than the school, or they as teachers, making adaptations for the child. Doucet and Tudge (2007) argued that it is the school culture that children are expected to adapt to. Teachers felt that nurseries should be 'preparing' children for school, whereas pre-school teachers saw their role differently, as discussed earlier. Overall, this led to an expectation from teachers that it was the child's job to 'fit in' to school and where

difficulties arose they were attributed to characteristics of the child rather than an aspect of the school environment, curriculum or teaching. This links back to concepts held by adults of children being ‘ready’ or ‘unready’ for school, as discussed in the earlier review. This is a worrying finding and does not fit with the theoretical models of Brofenbrenner’s (2001) ecological model and Meisels’ (1998) interactionist approach to school readiness. In the author’s experience as a psychologist working with teachers in Scotland this is an attitude that she has encountered from some teachers. However, she feels this is changing with increased awareness of research and the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004). This change is relatively recent and the author hopes that if this research were carried out in the near future a more flexible and inclusive perspective might be found in teachers. However, with respect to this study it will be important to take into account the views of P1 teachers on how the case study children have adjusted to P1.

Supporting transitions

Researchers agree that it is important to get this first educational transition right, as early success at school both socially and academically impacts not only on a child’s adjustment to school but also their longer-term educational success (Burrell & Bubb, 2000; Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Some of the recent research has therefore focused on qualities in children, families and educational settings that support transition (an extensive and recent review in this area is given by Peters, 2010). However, Doucet and Tudge (2007) argued that, when identifying this as a positive quality in children and families, we need to be wary of making assumptions about a child and their family if these have not developed. In their chapter they emphasise the importance of taking account of a child’s cultural context and building from the families’ strengths and starting point. Peters (2010) gives direct examples of this from Maori children in a New Zealand context. Some research studies have also evaluated different practices and support that have been put into place to support transition.

Dockett and Perry (2005) highlighted the importance of ensuring that creative ways are found of listening to the voice of the child so that they can be effectively

supported in sharing their views, and in supporting their future peers in making this transition. In their study they gave school children digital cameras to take photographs of school to show children in pre-school. These were then developed into books about school, which the school children shared with pre-school children when they visited their pre-school setting. Dockett and Perry reflected that the children took on an active and competent role in this process and had different insights into school than an adult would. However they do not evaluate whether this created a more effective transition to school for the children involved in their study.

Newman and Blackburn (2002) in their literature review explored factors that helped children to be resilient at times of transition. They found that having a strong social support network, an unconditionally supportive parent or carer, a sense of mastery, a belief that their actions made a difference and an ability to reframe situations helped children to make a more positive transition to school.

Bradshaw et al. (2012) generated a list of thirteen possible transition activities and asked parents about their engagement with these. They reported that 99% of parents said they had engaged in some kind of transition activity with their child, the most common being talking with their child about school (92% of parents). However, parents - particularly those from more disadvantaged backgrounds - were less confident about seeking and receiving advice from their child's school. Unfortunately they did not go on to evaluate what impact these different types of activity had on the child's perceived adjustment to school, and their data is based solely on the parents' perspectives. Pianta et al. (1999) looked at teacher reports of various transition activities and found the most common ones that teachers reported using were talking to a child's parents about school once their child had started school. They argued that taking this approach is less optimal in supporting children's transition than talking to the child's parents **before** their child moves to school. Early et al. (2001) carried out a survey of kindergarten teachers' transition practices building on this earlier study and found that teachers engaged in less helpful transition practices, typically not carrying

out activities whilst the child is still in a preschool setting, or not engaging individually with a child and their family before starting school.

Researchers have identified a range of transition programmes and activities created to support a more effective transition process. Examples of this kind of activity include pre-school and school staff meeting to share information about the child, written transition reports, the child and parent visiting the school/ spending time in their new class, the school teacher joining the child's pre-school class and joint pre-school and school activities (Brostrom , 2002, Loscale-Crouch et al. 2008, Margetts, 2007, Stephen & Cope, 2003 b) or more specific transition programmes (Clarke, 2007, Smith, 2003). However, Hannah et al. (2010) found that in general there appear to have been relatively few studies of pre-school to primary transition that have investigated the effectiveness of the transition programme against outcomes for the child. Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) have developed an evaluation framework based on their evaluation of best transition practices to support this kind of evaluation. They suggested that the key things in an effective transition programme are that it: *fosters relationships as resources, promotes continuity from Pre-school to Kindergarten, focuses on family strengths, tailors practice to individual needs, forms collaborative relationships*' (page 2). Based on her literature review of recent research Peters (2010) identified similar key features of what a successful transition should entail. It: *'creates a sense of belonging and well being at school, fosters engagement in learning, develops responsive and reciprocal relationships between all, fosters children's friendships and looks at the child's whole experience of school'* (summarised from Figure 1 p. 78). It could be argued that one limitation of both Peters and Kraft Sayre and Pianta et al.'s research in relation to this study is that they have focused on a New Zealand and North American context respectively. However, it seems to the author that these principles have a wider and more general application to pre-school to primary transition and therefore have a relevance to the UK context of this study.

Studies that have evaluated transition programmes have found that experiencing a purposeful, well co-ordinated transition programme with a variety of transition activities does help a child to make a successful transition to school, particularly for those who come from higher risk groups (Smith, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Loscale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer and Pianta, 2008 Dockett et al., 2011; Kennedy et al. 2012). As part of this the programme should find ways to involve parents in the process (Peters, 2010; Dockett et al. 2011). However, there can be barriers that prevent an effective transition process from happening. These include lack of time and resources, different attitudes and values between pre-school and school staff, class lists being issued too late, too many settings to visit and professional secrecy (Pianta et al., 1999; Borstrom, 2000; Stephen & Cope, 2003 a).

From this literature review it is evident that concepts of school readiness and supporting a child's transition from early years settings to school are linked. This first educational transition is a complex, interactive process that involves a range of stakeholders: parents, pre-school staff and school staff, communities and the children themselves. In making sense of this complex set of stakeholders and interactions Brofenbrenner's (2001) ecological model applied to transition and Meisels' (1998) interactionist model of school readiness appear to have the support and current attention of researchers in this field.

Gathering The Views Of Young Children, Particularly Those With Additional Support Needs

A finding that emerged from the author's initial literature review was that other research studies of delaying school entry and school readiness had not gathered children's views. The author wanted to find a way to effectively capture children's views as part of her study and therefore undertook a literature review to develop her own methods for doing so.

Legislative context

The importance of ensuring that children participate in decision-making processes that affect them and have their view heard is enshrined in children's rights legislation, Article 12 of the 1989 United Convention Rights of the child states:

“State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own opinion the right to express these views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” (12.1, United Convention Rights of the Child 1989)

In English legislation this emphasis is reflected in both the Every Child Matters paper (HMS Treasury, 2003) and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES 2001). In the Scottish context of this study legislation such as the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 and 2009 place a similar emphasis (Scottish Executive 2004 & 2009). The following excerpt from the code of practice, which accompanies this legislation, illustrates this:

“All children and young people should have the opportunity to make their views known about decisions which affect them. They should have the opportunity to express their opinions and have these opinions taken seriously. They should be encouraged to contribute to decision-making processes, the setting of educational objectives, the preparation of learning plans, reviews and transition planning. They need to know that what they have to say will be respected, listened to and, where appropriate, acted on.” (Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 81)

Possible issues in seeking the views of young children

Given this legislative context it is disappointing that the author found as part of her earlier literature review that children's views had not been collected. This may be because researchers felt that the children concerned were too young to be able to express a view. Clark, McQuail and Moss' (2003) review of the existing literature on listening to children under five years of age would confirm this. They looked at

existing Early Years and Child Care Partnership audits and carried out a further email survey to calculate how many of these took into account the views of young children. They found that only a third collected children's views (27 out of a possible 89) and only seven of these focused on the views of children under five years of age. However, there were also some issues with Clark et al.'s study as they do not include all the childcare audits in their analysis or justify this omission. If all audits had been looked at, it is possible numbers would have been greater, though the overall proportion may have remained the same. These audits were carried out in an English local authority context. Scotland has a different legislative context and educational approach so the picture might be different here. However, Kathleen Marshall's (ex-children's commissioner for Scotland 2006), challenge of the assumption that it is not possible to collect very young children's view would suggest that this is also an issue in Scotland. She argued that it is up to the adults working with a child to find a way of understanding how the child expresses their views. This impetus has been continued with the 'right to blether' campaign instigated by Scotland's current children commissioner, Tam Baillie in 2010. Initially this campaign-included children aged five and over, but in 2011 it was extended to children aged two to five (Baillie, 2011). The children involved in the project were asked to complete a 'wee book about me' and answer questions about how they were feeling, what makes them smile, who is special to them, where they would put a special star and what they would like to change. Although Baillie asks what the children would like to change, the data stemming from does not seem to encourage children to express the more negative aspects of their experiences. The author aimed to try and find a way to capture this in her own study.

The children in the author's study had complex additional support needs and this might present a further barrier to seeking their views. Dickins (2008) argued that young children with disabilities have been ignored in recent initiatives to seek and take account of children's views. She highlighted one example from an NSPCC article where a social worker states on a form that it is not possible to seek the child's views, as they have no speech and therefore their view is not available

(NSPCC/Triangle 2001, cited in Dickins, 2008). She argued that there is a both a legal and moral need to find a way to achieve this. However, she based her arguments on first-hand experience and a few anecdotal examples rather than a review of the literature, so this affects the strength of her position. Clark et al. (2003) concluded from their more extensive literature review that there were very few examples in published articles where the views of young children with disabilities have been gathered and suggested there is a need for more research in this area. The author in her reading around the subject found a recent article by Paige-Smith and Rix (2011), which reported on methods used with two young children with Down's syndrome.

Techniques for listening to children's views

The author surveyed literature from the last ten years looking at methodologies that could/ have been used to seek and take account of young children's views, particularly those who also have a disability. Hobbs, Todd and Taylor (2000) discussed 22 articles published in the 1990s that aimed to explore ways of gathering children's views or issues around this topic. In their analysis they take an EP perspective and focus their discussion predominantly on consulting with children with additional support needs. The author found 20 more recent publications in this area in the last ten years in her search of the SCOPUS database and Google Scholar, one of which was a special Support for Learning (2004) edition on consulting with children with more complex disabilities. Since this review Barrow and Hannah (2012) have published a paper about using a computer-assisted interviewing technique to gain the views of children with autism, although the children in their study were older (9-15 years old).

One article by Mortimer (2004) specifically addressed the topic of gathering the views of young children with disabilities. She cited four overriding principles of listening based on work by Drummond, Rouse and Pugh (1992):

- *“...The methods we choose for communication, assessment and intervention must be appropriate for the child. There must be no danger of bias.*
- *...We need to attend to their whole development and lives and not to certain aspects of it.*
- *...practitioners inevitably have ‘power’ when communicating with children and their families and this needs to be acknowledged and used lovingly, wisely and well.*
- *...assessment and intervention must enhance the child’s life, learning and development.” (Mortimer 2004, p170, paragraph 3)*

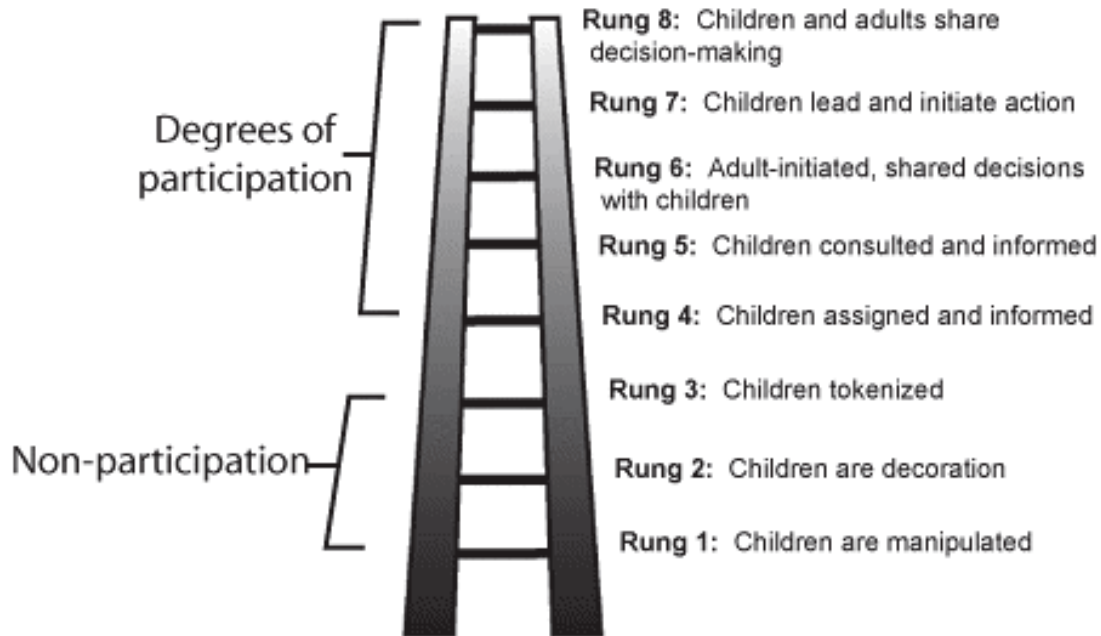
She went on to describe a variety of methods practitioners could use to ‘listen’ to young disabled children, including: observation and interpretation; child centred assessments; play-based approaches, including parent and child input into welcome profiles; using children’s drawings and photographs taken by them; using stories and picture books as a stimulus for introducing and talking about different or new situations; consulting with children about their individual education plans and using circle time. She offers a rich description of each approach but unfortunately does not evaluate each one, link it to a theoretical base or cite other studies that have used or evaluated them.

Hobbs et al. (2000) specifically explored the EPs’ role in consulting with children. They noted that there are tensions for EPs doing this, as they need to be aware of psychological models influencing their practice and listen to the multiple voices of children, parents and other professionals within their own working context. They observed that there has been a shift away from a ‘medical’ model, where difficulties are seen to be located within the child, to a more socio-cultural perspective that takes into account the child’s context and their interactions within this. They linked these ideas to potential theoretical frameworks and recommend the use of consultative frameworks incorporating Person Centred Planning (PCP) and Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) ideas as a way of facilitating consultation with children. A

theoretical argument for using these approaches is developed but with no direct link to studies using them.

Clark et al. (2003) took a more systematic approach, looking at 6 case studies and a review of Danish and Dutch research to try and tease out methodology and practice used in this area. From this they identified two different types of listening happening: 'everyday listening' where practitioners regularly listen to children and gather their views over time, and 'one-off consultations' on a particular topic or area. They organised the current methodologies used to gather the views of children into three broad areas: observation; traditional consultation techniques (adapted from existing research practice e.g. interviews, focus groups, questionnaires): structured and multi-sensory methods (such as role play, using puppets, participatory games and encouraging the use of cameras). They found that case studies using these techniques identified a number of key themes important to young children. They warned that one must be wary of regarding these children as a homogenous group and called for more research in this area. A mainly descriptive rather than an evaluative approach is taken, due partly to the constraint of a limited number of studies in this area.

Crichton and Barrett (2007) took a psychological perspective to looking at possible methodological approaches in their research. In addition to the methodological areas described by Clark et al. (2003), they also noted an increasing practice of children working jointly with educational practitioners as co-researchers (Burton, Smith & Woods, 2010 carry out a recent study in this area). They argued that researchers have previously focused on the idea of 'consulting' with children, which they describe as a one-off attempt to gain children's views, and contrasting these with those of an adult. More recently the research emphasis has shifted to encouraging children to 'participate' actively in a process which ascertains their views but also, as a result, allows them to influence change. The stages in trying to achieve this are reflected in Hart's (1992) ladder of participation, illustrated in Figure 3-1.



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Figure 3-1. Hart's ladder of participation (included by permission of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA))

Hart (1992) adapted his ideas from an original ladder used by Arnstein (1969 cited in Hart 1992) in adult community planning. The lower rungs put children in a non-participatory role and therefore don't ensure their active involvement. Hart argued that we need to ensure that the approaches we take move beyond this to involve children actively in the process, setting a standard of shared decision making between children and adults on the highest rung of the ladder.

Crichton and Barrett (2007) explored techniques that can be used to achieve effective participation of children and young people. They cited some of O'Kane's (2002) suggestions, such as making the process active and enjoyable, creating a dialogue over time, giving the young people some control over the process and offering them concrete examples and ideas to work from.

Crichton and Barrett (2007) developed an evaluation tool based on the principle of children's participation and applied this to evaluating several projects: an on-line

computer assessment of children's views and a co-researching project in a Young Persons Unit. The on-line computer assessment was trialled with a nursery-aged child with some success (Barrett, 2007). More recent research by Aston and Lambert (2010) aimed to find ways for young people to participate in decision making processes, but the children in this study were older than the children in this current study. Hayes (2004) reported how using a method involving drawing and pictures helped a young person with additional support needs participate in their review meeting. A restriction of her study is that she reported only on its use with one pupil, but her evaluation of the pupil's response to this type of approach highlights the usefulness of visual methods for pupils with additional support needs.

Clark and Moss (2001) combined some of the methods discussed by other authors into a framework that can be used with young children, naming this technique 'The Mosaic Approach.' This mixed methods approach aims to offer a 'framework for listening' (Clark & Moss, 2001) to young children's views. Clark and Moss argued that the listening process should not be limited to the spoken word since a lot can be learned about children's perspectives by observing and interpreting their play, actions and reactions. The approach also aimed to find ways for the child to participate fully in the listening process and be given the opportunity to act as 'experts in their own lives'. A reflexive element is built in where children, practitioners and parents are encouraged to reflect on the child's experiences and the interpretations that can be derived from this. The approach aimed to look at the child's everyday experiences in the here and now, and to be adaptable and embedded into everyday practice in early childhood settings. There are two stages to the process. The first stage collects data about what everyday life is like for the child in their early years setting. This entails practitioners and parents reflecting on what the child's day to day life is like, observing the child in the setting to look at how they spend their time, asking the child direct questions about their experiences, asking the child to take the researcher on a 'tour' of their setting during which they take photos and talk about their experiences in the setting. Sometimes role-play is used as a further tool for encouraging the child to talk about their experiences. In the second stage all the

pieces of information are brought together to try and build a richer picture of the child's experiences (hence the term "mosaic"). It is at this stage that a fuller interpretation of the data is carried out with information from the different data sources being compared and triangulated. For example the researcher might notice that the parent makes reference to their child liking sensory play. The researcher may then more frequently observe them taking part in this play and see that this is the first place that they choose to take a researcher during a tour. From this they may conclude that sensory play is therefore a favourite activity of the child. However, Warming (2003) noted that confirmation of information through triangulation is not the sole purpose of using a variety of methods, noting: "This is not just for the purpose of triangulation, but rather to create manifold perspectives and to listen more effectively." (Warming 2003, Appendix C, in Clark et al. 2003, p. 34)

Clark and Moss (2001) offered their own critique of some of the 'pitfalls of listening'. They noted that listening should not be seen as the adult's right but needs to be balanced by respecting a child's right to privacy and not intruding into their play and experiences in their early years setting. They warned that the data collected should not be used to regulate either the child or the practitioner's work. If the agenda of listening to children is changed, there is a risk that listening becomes a compulsory activity, which again conflicts with the need to respect privacy. The author was aware of these issues in carrying out this research, and where children indicated by their body language or comments that they no longer wanted to take part in an activity, it was discontinued. Also, where the data was shared with the nursery, it was emphasised that this was a snapshot of the children's experiences and should not be over- interpreted.

In a later article Clark and Stratham (2005) mentioned a third stage in the process - 'deciding on areas of continuity and change' (Clark & Statham 2005, p. 49).

This stage aims to ensure that the information collected from children is also acted on to influence change. Clark and Moss (2001) used the approach to collect children's

views about their setting. Clark et al. (2003) applied the approach to a project where children reflected on their play spaces and the third stage was developed on the basis of this. The gathering of children's perspectives was used as a way of helping staff to consider what changes could or should be made to the children's play environments. Paige-Smith and Rix (2011) used a mixture of narrative observation, photographic record of the children's play and interaction and reflective discussion with the parent to build a picture of the interests of two children with Down's syndrome. They reported that this helped one parent to understand that his child was interested in, and satisfied by, throwing things. The father reported that now rather than trying to stop his son from throwing, he was trying to show his child how to do it in a more purposeful way.

From this literature review the author concluded that the area of gathering the views of young children with additional support needs is an important but relatively new field of research. When developing a methodology for achieving this it is important to ensure that the methods are active, participative and enjoyable for the children concerned and gather data from a variety of sources. Researchers also need to take account of the child's rights to privacy and their indications that they no longer wish to take part. It is also important to consider how the information can be taken into account in further improving the child's experiences in the future.

Chapter 4. Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe the ontological and epistemological perspective taken by the author in conducting this research. It will outline how this then linked to the research design of the study and the data collection methods used. A detailed description will be given of the specific procedures used for data collection, selection of cases, data analysis and ethical issues.

This study aimed to address two distinct but related areas: the decision making process for retentions and the experiences of the child and their family during and after a retained year in nursery. In order to explore the experiences of the children involved in the study the author aimed to develop and apply a methodological approach for gathering the views of young children with complex additional support needs.

Ontological Position And Epistemological Perspective

Grix (2002) argued in his article that before embarking on designing a research project it is important to first clarify the ontological and in turn the epistemological perspective that is being taken. He defined ontology as the researcher's perspective on the nature of social reality and knowledge. He proposed that broadly there are two ontological positions that can be taken: 'objectivism' (social phenomena exist independently of interactions between human beings) and 'constructivism' (social phenomena emerge as a direct result of human interactions and are constantly changing). Grix argued that this in turn influences the epistemological perspective that a researcher might take with respect to possible ways of gaining further knowledge of the social phenomena under investigation. As regards the epistemological aspect Grix also proposes that there are two perspectives a researcher could take. The first is the positivist approach (this links to the ontological position of objectivism) in which natural science/ experimental methods are applied to the topic

under investigation. Robson (2011) noted that, historically, researchers adopting this position used quantitative methods where deductive criteria are applied, an experimental approach taken and a neutral 'objective' position sought (p.18-19). The second perspective is interpretivism (this links to the ontological position of constructivism) where methods need to be found that explore and respect the different perspectives held by participants and emphasise the subjective nature of knowledge. Robson (2011) noted that, traditionally, researchers who have adopted this position have applied qualitative methodology where a more inductive approach is taken to the research process, the research being conducted in more naturalistic settings and its design emerging as part of the research process (page 19). In the author's view these perspectives offer a useful starting point in planning research. However, Robson (2011) and Holloway and Todres (2011) give much greater detail about different methodologies that have developed within each tradition and therefore Grix's article may oversimplify the issues involved.

Holloway and Todres (2003) discussed what they see to be the main qualitative methodologies (phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography) that have developed over time and the differences between them. They argued that although there is overlap and that flexibility is increasingly seen as important, this could detract from the consistency and coherence that comes from working more closely within one qualitative framework.

Conversely, Robson (2011) noted that a more pragmatic approach combining together qualitative and quantitative methods has become increasingly popular. This 'realist' approach, Robson argued, sees fact as being theory-laden, acknowledges the complexity of the real world and aims to explain how an event has occurred, even if it cannot be predicted (p. 31). To the author this more pragmatic view fits well with the eclectic approach that she takes as an educational psychologist. However, in reflecting on the position and perspective that she would take for this piece of research she was mindful of Grix's (2002) warning:

“I think we should guard against ‘method-led’ research, that is, allowing ourselves to be led by a particular research method rather than ‘question-led’ research, whereby research questions point to the most appropriate research method.” (Grix 2002, page 180)

Grix goes on to emphasise the importance of ensuring that all parts of the research approach connect together logically.

Therefore, in considering the ontological position and epistemological perspective to be taken in this piece of research the author returned to the theoretical frameworks of school readiness that had emerged from her literature review and her central research questions. With respect to the nature of knowledge concerning school readiness it seemed to the author that there may be some fundamental facts about the underlying stages of development a child passes through from which these models have developed. For example, although Donaldson (1978) presented some powerful arguments against Piaget’s staged model of child development, (Piaget 1959/2002) research studies consistently find that if the developmental tasks are carried out in the same way, they do seem to demonstrate universal stages that children pass through (Nunes & Bryant, 2004). This might constitute evidence of an underlying objective knowledge base. However, the earlier literature review suggested that the model of school readiness an individual ascribes to is influenced by their beliefs and values built up through interactions with others and experiences over time. These models have shifted and altered over time in response to debate and discussion in the field, and the interactionist model (Meisels, 1998) suggests multi-directional influences from a variety of sources. Overall, the author felt that this pointed the ontological position of this research more towards constructivism.

The author then considered her research questions against the possible epistemological perspective of interpretivism that adopting this ontological position implied. The questions were aimed at finding out more about how the decision-

making process operated and the experiences of a range of different participants over time. It was also the author's intention to set this data against models of school readiness. Taking a qualitative, interpretive approach seemed to fit well in terms of answering these questions and allowing comparison against a theoretical framework, whereas adopting a more positivist experimental approach seemed less appropriate. For example, the children in this study had been retained for a variety of reasons and at the time of carrying out the study it was rare for such requests to be turned down. Therefore it would not have been possible to identify a control and experimental group and track their progress over time in a positivist fashion. The author therefore decided to take a predominantly qualitative approach whilst keeping in mind the opportunities that taking a 'realist' (Robson, 2011) perspective within this might offer. To allow for a detailed exploration of the children and families over a period of time the author decided to carry out a series of longitudinal case studies. Further detail of this approach and the methods used are given in the next sections.

Research Design And Methods

Decision Making Process for Retentions

The author wanted to explore the decision making process behind nursery retentions in her own local authority. This topic is a contemporary phenomenon and the process is one over which the author has little influence or control. Of the three research questions posed, two ask 'how' with the overall aim of thoroughly exploring the decision making process. These are conditions that Yin (2009) suggested make an explanatory case study an appropriate research strategy. A single case study with embedded units of analysis was therefore developed for this part of the research as illustrated in Figure 4-1.

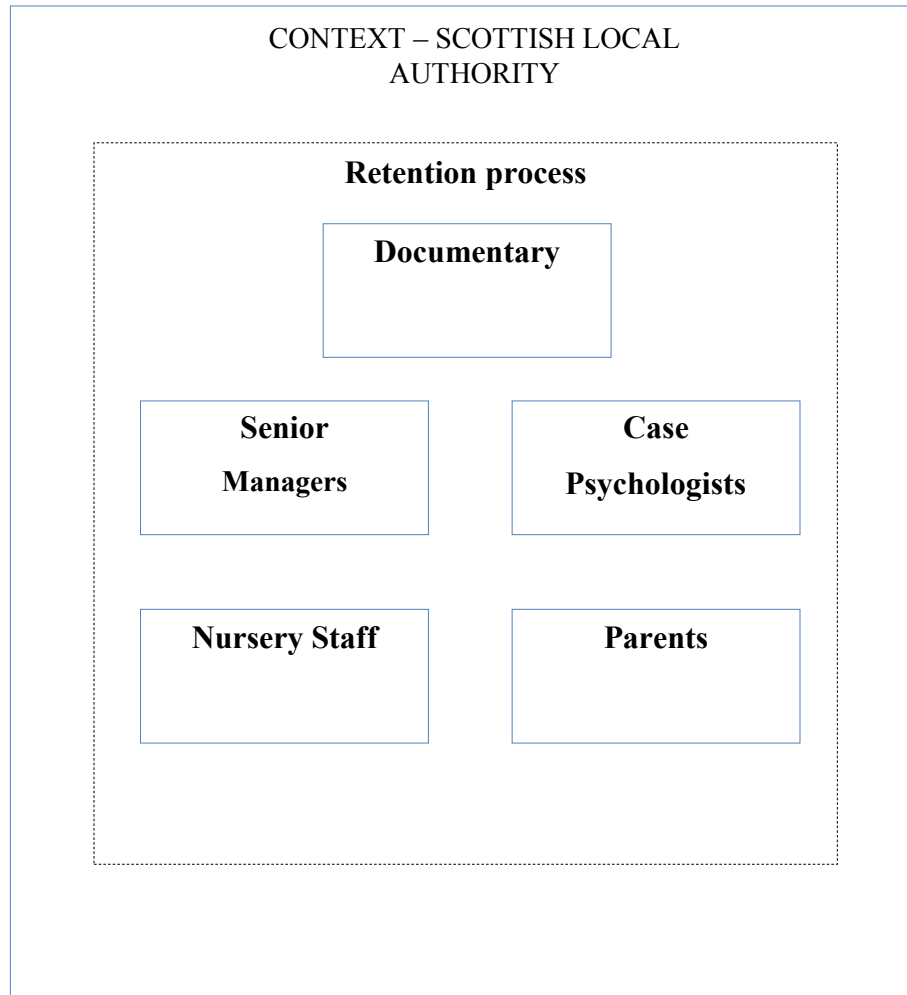


Figure 4-1 A diagram showing the research design for the decision making process, adapted from Yin (2009)

Questions about the decision making process had originally arisen from the concern of the author's colleagues within a service early years group. The author's own experience of the current process was that it was not fully understood by everyone involved and at times seemed inconsistent. The author realised that these perceptions were likely to influence the later data collection process and that she was a participant as well as a researcher in the process. To maintain the rigour of the study the author decided to adopt data triangulation (Robson, 2011) and used several data collection methods - analysis of documentary information about the process and semi-structured interviews. Additionally she decided to adopt source triangulation by interviewing a range of participants involved in the process - educational psychology

service managers, case psychologists, parents and relevant education staff. Robson (2011) argued that triangulation is a useful approach to increase the rigour of a study and avoid bias. However, when the findings are collected using different methods and sources there can be an increased likelihood that they differ from each other significantly. This is one consequence of adopting an interpretive approach, and the author felt that this would occur in her research given the complexity and differing models of school readiness that the literature review had highlighted. She was aware that this was a factor she would need to pay close attention to in later analysis of the data.

One of the data sources used in this study was documentary data both about the retention decision making process and plans for children and minutes of review meetings about their progress. The author was mindful of the advantages and disadvantages of using documentary analysis. Robson (2011) noted some advantages - it can offer a more unobtrusive, permanent record for analysis and may offer a more 'objective' source, as the documents are usually intended for a different audience and purpose than the current research. However, equally, Robson (2011) noted that this could be a disadvantage, as the document may not fully address the questions being posed. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008) noted that the main advantage of documentary sources is that it can make the topic being studied more visible. Cohen et al. identified a number of issues with documentary sources, namely: that it may not exist; it may come in such a range of forms that it is difficult to analyse; it may exist but not be accessible to the researcher and the context it was written in must be borne in mind. Robson (2011) also noted that if a content analysis approach is being carried out it might not be possible to identify a causal relationship using documentary sources. To overcome some of these difficulties Cohen et al. offered a list of questions that a researcher should consider with respect to the data's context, author and the researcher's interaction with it (p. 202-203). To overcome some of the disadvantages identified here the author bore these questions in mind when selecting and analysing the data.

The author chose to use semi-structured interviews, as she shared Drever's (2006) view that it would offer a flexible technique for gathering and exploring participants' thinking about the retention decision making process, would yield rich information and would offer broad coverage of the topic. She also felt that the strength of offering a '*conversational and situational style*' identified by Cohen et al.(2008, p. 353) fitted well with the approach she hoped to take and would allow participants to relax and share their views fully. However, she was also aware of disadvantages that adopting this technique would entail. Drever (2006) noted that interviews could be time consuming both to conduct and analyse. To address this disadvantage the author planned ahead to identify dedicated time periods for conducting the interviews. An audio recording of the interviews (with the informed consent of participants) was made so that where the analysis was retrospective an accurate original was still available to refer to. Drever (2006) also warned that interviewing does require a certain amount of skill. For the author, interviewing teachers, parents and children was a core constituent of her job so felt that this was a skill she had developed.. However, she also aimed to maintain an attitude of listening to and exploring participants' views rather than offering her own opinions on the topic during the interviews. Cohen et al. (2008) noted that one weakness of this interviewing style was that important topics might be missed out and interviewer flexibility in wording questions might mean responses were less easy to analyse and compare. To avoid this the author developed an overall schedule of questions with follow-up prompts. During the interview she ticked off each area once covered and made sure she returned to ones that were not addressed at the end. She also asked her supervisors to read over a draft of the interview schedules to check for any coverage that she might have missed (see Appendix 2, 3, and 5 for schedules used).

The author was aware from conversations within the service and early years group that her perspective on the process might be different from that of some of her colleagues. She therefore also asked a colleague to read over the data analysis and interpretations of the data she had collected to see if this fitted their perceptions from working within the same service. To widen this even more the main findings were

also presented to all colleagues in the service as part of a CPD event in 2011 and this resulted in a follow-up discussion with all the psychologists attending and further verification of the results. Robson (2011) noted that such ‘peer debriefing and support’ (p. 158) is another way of increasing the rigour of a qualitative study.

From the literature review in Chapter 3 one strong theme that emerged was the influence of people’s models of school readiness on the decision making process around transition to school. This is the theoretical framework that will be used to explore the data emerging from this section in the discussion chapter. The following research questions guided this process:

- How does the decision making process for retentions operate in this local authority?
- What information does everyone take into account during this process?
- How does the data fit with contemporary models of school readiness?

Experiences of an additional year in nursery and into P1

For the second part of the research process the author wanted to explore the experiences and progress of retained children and their families during the additional year in nursery, in transition to school and during their first year in school. In order to achieve this tracking of children over time a longitudinal element was built into the case study strategy.

Speaking to senior managers in psychological services, the author surveyed the numbers of retained children in the authority per year and found that numbers were usually between the mid teens and early twenties. The children concerned were retained for a variety of reasons, making each one a unique case. Authority guidance suggested that the decision to retain should be taken only after extensive discussion and multi-agency review. It would, therefore, have been difficult and potentially unethical to produce a quantitative experimental design where matched retained and non-retained children were compared. Instead a qualitative approach was taken to try

to capture the children's and their families' experience over time. Data was collected at two time points - at the end of the children's additional year in nursery and at the end of their P1 year. A longitudinal descriptive and explanatory multiple case study design was developed to explore the research questions. The overall context of the same local authority remained constant, but within each case study embedded units of analysis used different data collection methods and sources to increase the reliability and rigour of the study. The final design for the two time points is illustrated in Figure 4-2 and Figure 4-3.

Advantages and disadvantages of using a case study approach

Taking a case study approach enabled data collection from a variety of sources with later triangulation of information. It also allowed the author to be both a participant and an observer in the data collection process. However, there can be disadvantages in case study research and these need to be borne in mind during data collection and later analysis. Yin (2009) explored these in depth and the points he raised in relation to the author's study are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Critics of a case study approach suggest there can be a lack of rigour in its use. Yin (2009) noted that this might partly stem from investigators letting biased views or incomplete evidence come into the process. To address this, the author set out to explore her own biases at the start of the process and take them into account both in the design and analysis. Interview schedules were developed and followed to ensure consistency between interviews. An audio recording and partial transcription of interviews was made wherever possible. Once audio data and hand-written notes had been compiled, the originals were destroyed. Themes and findings were also discussed with colleagues to see if this fitted with their experience. Several data collection methods and sources were used to increase rigour and check themes by triangulation of data.



Figure 4-2 Illustrating longitudinal design in first year of data collection, adapted from Yin (2009)

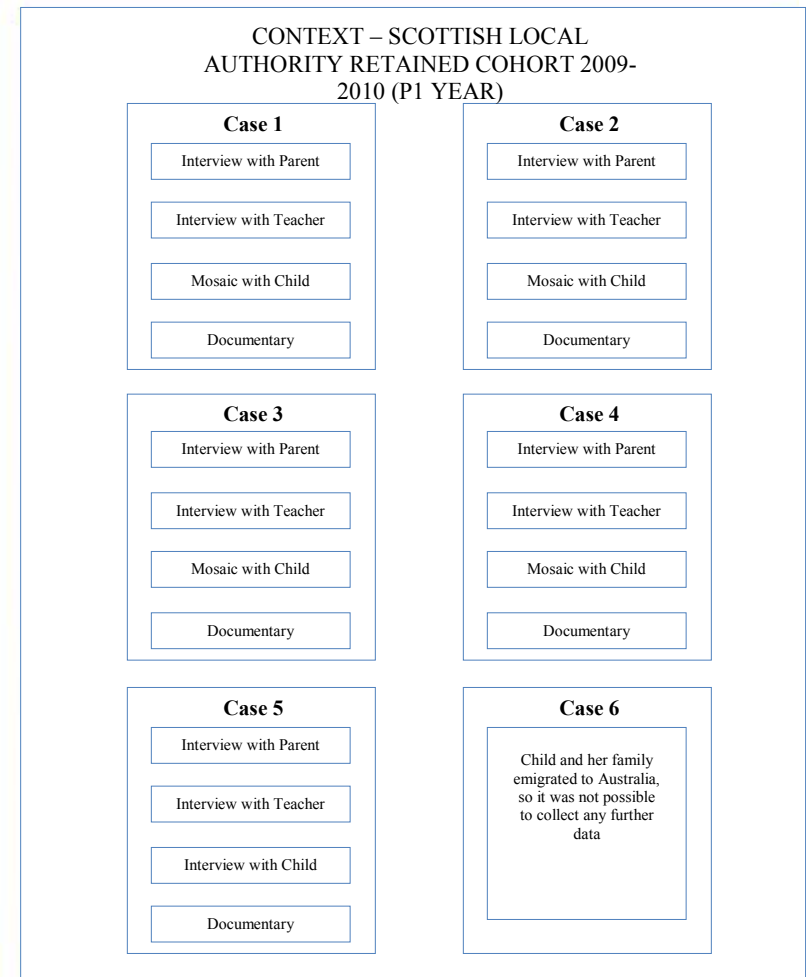


Figure 4-3 Illustrating longitudinal design in second year of data collection, adapted from Yin (2009)

Some critics also question whether the findings from case study research can be generalised beyond the immediate context of the case study. It is hoped that this study will not only help clarify the process and issues for the author's own local authority but will also provide a model and information for similar situations both within her authority and beyond. In the author's initial literature review an absence of UK research into the delaying of school entry was identified and the author felt that this study would help in beginning to fill this gap.

A further criticism is that carrying out a case study takes too long and that the amount of data presented leads to large, difficult to read reports. The author has attempted to address this by condensing the information collected into tables, diagrams and flow charts to give the reader an overview of the information that emerged from the study.

A personal concern of the author was that the decision to retain might be linked to putting off a more difficult decision about future educational provision. Information was therefore collected about the children's school destinations in P1 and P2 to look at this issue. The author was aware that she might take a sceptical view of the benefits of retention and this might skew data collection. To avoid this a triangulation approach was again developed incorporating several data collection methods (documentary evidence of decision making process, planning frameworks for children and review minutes, semi-structured interviews and direct interaction with and observation of the children involved) and using different sources for the interviews (children, parents, psychologists and education staff). When developing the semi-structured interview questions the author tried to ensure that the resulting schedule maintained a balance of predominantly open-ended questions and follow up prompts where needed. Drever (2006) noted that open-ended questions gain a fuller response from the interviewee and allow them more freedom to express their own views. As noted in the earlier section, the author asked her supervisors to read over

the draft interview schedules and give feedback. The following research questions guided the data collection in this part of the research process:

- What are the staff and parent experiences of the child's additional year in nursery in terms of:
 - The progress the child makes both during their retained year in nursery and once they start school with respect to:
 - Social and emotional development
 - Skills acquired, particularly in areas where additional needs were identified
 - Perceived positive experiences/benefits of the retained year in nursery and P1
 - Perceived negative experiences/issues of the retained year in nursery and P1
 - The child's transition into the first and second years of primary school?

Developing A Methodology To Capture The Views And Experiences Of Young Children With Complex Additional Support Needs

A final aim of this study was to develop a methodology to capture the views of young children with additional support needs and to trial it. From the earlier literature review outlined in the previous chapter the author felt that, for a starting point in her study, the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) offered a helpful methodology and framework for capturing the views of the children. It encompassed several features that other authors had identified as important in this process:

- It lets the children take an active part in the process by answering questions about their experiences, taking the researcher on a tour and recording this using a camera.
- It collects data from several sources and uses different methods, facilitating the confirmation/ cross checking of information through triangulation but also reflecting the complex world that children live in.
- It does not rely on the child being able to 'speak'; information can also be gathered through observation, collecting perspectives from those who know the child well and allowing the child to capture their environment using a camera.

Observation was another method of data collection introduced to this part of the research. Robson (2011) argued that the strengths of observation are its flexibility and ability to deal with a complicated or unclear situation. However, Robson also noted that there is a risk of bias creeping in, depending on which features the observer attends to and or ignores, and what information they record. Cohen et al. (2007) additionally warned that by just focusing on the present context a researcher may ignore things that have led up to an event and the observer's very presence may affect the way that the participants they are observing behave. The latter point is one the author is very aware of in her work as an EP. It is a common experience for her to be told by education staff that a child has behaved differently due to her presence (particularly when observing children who have social, emotional and behavioural needs). To overcome this risk she asked education staff after each observation 'how typical' they felt the child's play and behaviour had been on the occasion of the observation. If they told her it was not typical, she planned to ask what a more typical sample might look like and take this into account in the 'adult comment' section of her analysis. (In fact, this happened in only one observation and on this occasion staff noted that the child was exploring the nursery less than usual. They attributed this to hay fever and a dose of Piriton that his mother had given him that morning.) Triangulation of data sources and methods is in-built into the mosaic method, so this again allowed for the cross comparison of different types of information. Finally, in recording the observation the author adopted a narrative approach, writing a factual

account of what the child had done during the period of the observation but also noting their facial expressions and demeanour as a way of judging their engagement with the various tasks. The author also wrote up her observation notes more thoroughly as soon as possible after carrying out the observation (usually on the same day, though other work commitments sometimes caused a delay of several days).

The children were also interviewed using Clark and Moss (2001) child conferencing questions (p.16-17). Advantages and disadvantages of interviews as a data collection method have been discussed earlier, but in carrying out interviews with the children the author was also mindful of additional issues that interviewing children can generate. Firstly, there can be a power imbalance between an adult and child in this situation. The author tried hard to put the children at ease and let them discontinue their participation if their facial expression or comments suggested they no longer wanted to participate. Secondly, partly as a result of this power imbalance, children may feel obliged to offer some kind of answer even if they don't know the answer or have misunderstood the question. Donaldson (1978) reported that young children will attempt to answer even bizarre questions such as 'Is milk bigger than water?' To try to overcome this the author ensured that questions were as factual and straightforward as possible. When carrying out the interview she did not put children under any additional pressure to answer questions. If the child did not answer a question, they were simply asked, "Shall I ask you a different question?"

The author's concern when deciding to adopt the mosaic method was the risk of imposing too much of her own inferences on the data collected and thereby making assumptions about children's preferences without fully checking these out with them. This was particularly important given the added complexity of the children's additional support needs. During the nursery phase of the study the author also wanted to gain a clearer view of both the child's current nursery environment and also what their view might be of the school environment they were moving to. In researching this area the author came across information about the 'Talking Mats' approach (Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) Research Unit at

Stirling University) developed to support people with communication difficulties. Since its early development the approach has diversified into a variety of applications. The participant is given a 'mat' and symbols representing 'things they like' and 'things they don't like'. They are then given cards with symbols representing a variety of activities and asked to sort them under these two symbols (see http://www.aslstirling.smallmajority.co.uk/video_index.html# and click on 'Consulting young children and people' for a video demonstration of this). The author felt there was potential for adapting this method for her own study. Instead of using the talking mat symbols she chose visual face symbols of smiling, neutral and happy faces and planned to ask the children to use these to sort the photos they took during their tour of the nursery. These symbols were chosen as the author felt they would be more familiar and accessible to the children.

When the author began working with the children in this study the decision to retain them in nursery had already been taken and indeed they were nearing the end of this additional year. The author was uncertain how clearly the children would be able to reflect on their view of the retention, given their age, needs and the length of time since this had taken place. Secondly, if the children's views were found to be negative, it would be contentious to feed this back to those involved, as the decision had already been taken and was not open to change. It was therefore felt inappropriate to gauge their view of the decision to retain them. Instead the author set out to capture the 'here and now' experiences of the children by looking with them at their current educational setting and how they felt about it. This was done over two time points to allow comparison between their views on a nursery and a school setting. A second aim was to develop and trial a method for gathering the views of young children with additional support needs. If the method was found to work well it could then be shared with practitioners as a way to gather this group of children's perspectives in the future. The author felt that she could achieve this by feeding back the process and resulting data at an authority level at the end of the project and possibly offering staff further training in using it. Doing this might help to ensure that children are more

fully included in this type of decision making processes in the future. The following research questions were used to guide the research in this area:

- How can the children's views and experiences be captured during their retained and P1 year?
- What are the children's views and experiences of their nursery and P1 environments?

Data collection process

By searching the local authority database and asking all area principals and case psychologists for information the author identified 13 children who were having a retained year in nursery during the academic session of 2008-2009. She wrote directly to all the families of these children asking for their consent to take part in a study (see Appendix 1 for letter and consent form). Six families from a range of different areas in the authority gave their consent. Basic biographical details about these families, as reported at the time of the first interview, are illustrated in Table 4-1.

Decision making process for retentions

The author began by collecting documentary evidence of the local authority's procedures for nursery retention. Through the author's own knowledge and discussion with the psychological service managers the following documents were identified:

- A letter from Council Solicitor in February 1997 to the Additional Support Services Manager addressing the issue of the legality of retentions.
- A memorandum from Additional Support Services Manager to all Principal Psychologists (now Area Principals) dated October 2000 noting that authorisation for all retention requests was now delegated to the Principal Psychologist

Table 4-1 Biographical details of the 6 case study families

Case No& name*	Gender	Pre-school setting	P1 destination	P2 destination	Siblings	Parental Occupations
1 Charlie	Male	Nursery class	Primary school nursery class was attached to	Same Primary School	Twin Older brother (age not specified by parent - upper primary)	Mum - support worker with elderly and disabled Dad - working as a shelf stacker at a DIY store
2 Ella	Female	Nursery class	Primary school nursery class was attached to	Same Primary School	Older brother 16	Mum - artist, single parent
3 Kevin	Male	Nursery class	Primary school nursery class was attached to	Same Primary School	Older sister 13	Mum - works in a bank Dad - train driver
4 Oliver	Male	Nursery class	Specialist provision in different authority for complex learning needs for 2 days, then returned to primary school nursery class was linked to	Specialist provision for children with complex learning needs in case study authority	Older brother 14	Mum - housewife Dad - taxi driver
5 George	Male	Nursery class	Aug.-Sept 2009 split placement between specialist provision for children with complex learning needs & mainstream school of link nursery class . Then full time place in specialist provision	Same Specialist Provision-full time. Split placement ended.	Older sister 8	Mum - primary school teacher Dad - civil engineer
6 Helen**	Female	Private partnership nursery	Local mainstream school. Emigrated to Australia in 2009	Family stay in Australia - school destination unknown.	Younger brothers; 3 years and 6 weeks	Mum - scientist/ PhD Dad - consultant ophthalmologist

*Please note that the children's names have been changed to protect their identity

** Please note that as this child and her family moved to Australia early in her P1 year, data could only be captured in the context of the decision making process for retentions. Her data is therefore reported on in chapter 5 but not in chapter 6.

- Email correspondence between principal psychologist and Additional Support Services Manager clarifying the criteria to be applied and process dated April 2008.
- A booklet entitled ‘Planning Transfer from Pre-school Settings to School for Children with Additional Support Needs’ produced by the psychological services early years group, which includes a description of the retention process. This booklet was produced jointly with the service manager who had a specific responsibility for early years issues within the service at the time of first data collection.

The author also carried out semi-structured interviews with the principal psychologist and four area principals about their role in, and views of, the decision making process and the criteria that were applied. These interviews were conducted in August 2009. A schedule of the interview questions can be seen in Appendix 2.

The author carried out semi-structured interviews with the parents of the case study children, nursery staff and case psychologists. To make effective use of time these interviews were carried out in the first round of data collection and asked about both the decision making process for each child’s retention and the interviewees’ perspective on the additional year in nursery.

Adult perspective of child’s experiences of additional year in nursery (Time point 1)

The first round of data collection was carried out at the end of the children’s additional year in nursery. Paperwork was collected from psychologists in November/December 2008. Interviews were carried out in April, May and June 2009, and additional paperwork was collected at the same time. In view of colleagues’ availability over the summer holiday period some interviews with case psychologists were conducted in August 2009, once some of the case study children had joined P1. The author:

- Asked case psychologists for copies of all the paperwork they had submitted to their area principal for the identified case study children.
- Asked nursery managers and case psychologists for copies of all paperwork relating to reviews or plans to support the child during their additional year in nursery.
- Carried out semi-structured interviews with the parent, case psychologist and an identified member of nursery staff for the case study children. The manager in the nursery or school setting was asked to identify who the most relevant person to interview would be. Questions covered the decision making process, the criteria used to reach the decision, the support the child had received, their progress during the year and views on the future transition to school (interview schedules can be seen in appendix 3). An audio recording was made of the interviews, where consent was given for this. In the one case where consent was not given, the interviewer made hand written notes instead.

Child's perspective during their additional year in nursery (Time point 1)

The author carried out this data collection in May and June 2009. She sought signed parental consent to work individually with the children as part of her interview with the parents. This allowed her to explain the proposed methods to the child's parents and ask them how well they thought the child would respond. She then planned her work with the child following on from this.

- To gain the children's perspective on their current educational setting the following activities were carried out:
 - Observation of the children for half an hour in the nursery taking particular note of the activities that they engaged in during this time.
 - Interviews with the children to ask them about their views of their current setting using child conferencing questions (Clark & Moss, 2001) (see e.g. in appendix 4),
 - Showing the case study children photos taken by P1 children in a city school of the things these children felt a nursery child coming to school

should know about. Then asking the case study child to sort these using ‘happy’, ‘sad’ and ‘ok’ faces. In this case the face pictures were laid out in a horizontal row on the table and the children were asked to make a pile of photos under the relevant face.

- Giving the case study children a digital camera and asking them to take photos of their own setting and then to sort them using the same face pictures as were used with the school photos. In this case the photos were downloaded directly onto a laptop computer. The children were given a card with each face on to indicate their choice. They could also point at an icon of the same face on the computer. The author then moved the picture into the relevant folder on the computer. When all photos were sorted, the author checked over the contents of each folder with the child.
- Relevant staff and parental comments about the child’s interests and dislikes from the semi structured interview data were also included in the comparisons carried out with this section of the data.

The overall data collection process is illustrated in Figure 4-4.

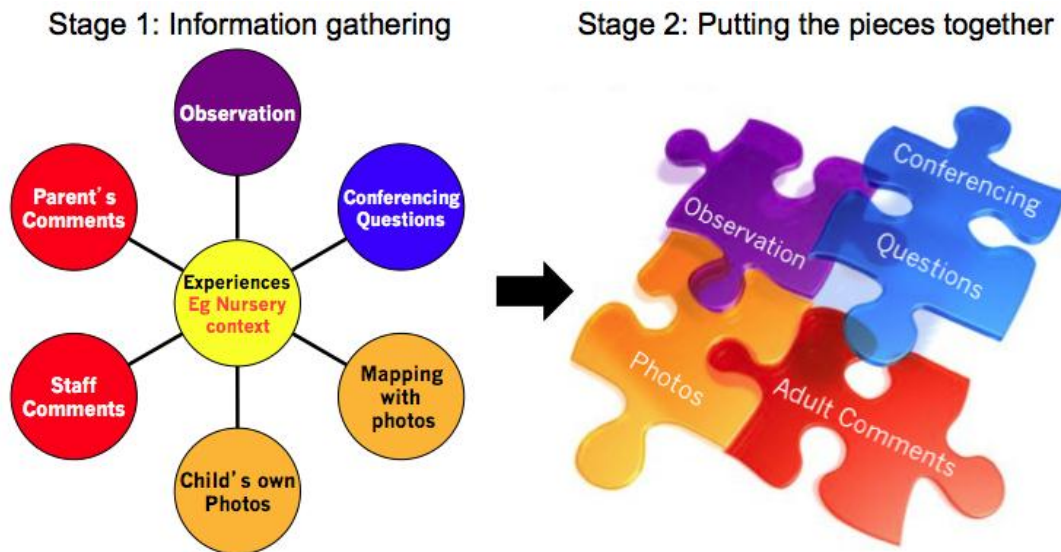


Figure 4-4. The data collection and initial analysis process for children’s perspective

Adults' perspective of the child's experiences at the end of P1 (Time point 2)

At the end of the child's P1 year a second round of data collection was carried out. All of the children were attending different primary schools in the local authority at this stage. Four were attending mainstream schools and one attended a special school. At this stage one of the mainstream children was preparing to make a transition to special school for his P2 year. This data collection was carried out in May and June 2010. The author:

- Collected all paperwork from the review meetings and planning frameworks for the case study children.
- Collected the child's baseline and P1 progress check scores. (In this local authority all children are given a baseline assessment during their first four weeks of school. This aims to measure their early literacy and numeracy skills. They also have a progress check assessment in the last few months of P1. This again aims to assess their literacy and numeracy skills)
- Carried out semi-structured interviews with the parent/s and P1 teachers. Questions asked were how the child had managed the transition to P1, what kind of additional supports had been put into place and what progress was made by the child (an example of the questionnaires used can be seen in Appendix 5). An audio recording was made of these interviews, where consent was given. In one case the interview was carried out in a noisy staff room environment and on this occasion hand written notes were made instead.
- Interviews were not conducted with case psychologists on this second occasion. The author checked with her colleagues about the level and nature of their involvement at the time of her second round of data collection. EPs mainly reported that their focus of involvement had been during the child's nursery year and in planning the transition to P1. For two of the five remaining cases the psychologist concerned reported that they had now ended their involvement in the case. Of the three remaining case study children one was now attending a

different school and therefore had had a change of psychologist. So of the remaining sample of five case study children only two psychologists were currently actively involved in the case and had been a consistent participant over the period of the study. The author also had less time for the second round of data collection due to an inspection of psychological services and a move of offices. She therefore decided not to interview EPs again but did seek a brief up-date of their views where they were still involved in the case.

Child's perspective of their P1 year (Time point 2)

- The author gathered the children's views using similar techniques based on the mosaic method (Clark & Moss, 2001) as follows:
 - Observation of the children for half an hour in their school setting.
 - Interviews with the children to ask them about their views of their current setting using child conferencing questions slightly adapted to take account of the P1 context. (Clark & Moss, 2001) (see appendix 6),
 - Giving the children a digital camera and asking them to take photos of their own setting and then sort them using the sad, happy and ok face icons. The photos were again downloaded directly onto a laptop computer. The children were possibly more used to working directly with an adult on a task after a year in school and some remembered the procedure from before, so on this occasion only the icons on the computer were used to assist the sorting of the photos. The author either moved the picture into the relevant folder on the computer, once the child had indicated their choice, or let the child to do so (if they were able to and indicated that they wanted to). When all the photos were sorted the author checked over the contents of each folder with the child.
 - As the children were now in P1 they were not shown pictures taken by other P1 children on this occasion. However, where possible their sorting of photos on this occasion was compared to their sorting of school photos in nursery to see if any changes in their perspectives had occurred.

A visual diagram of the data collection process at the two time points of the study is given in Figure 4-5 below:

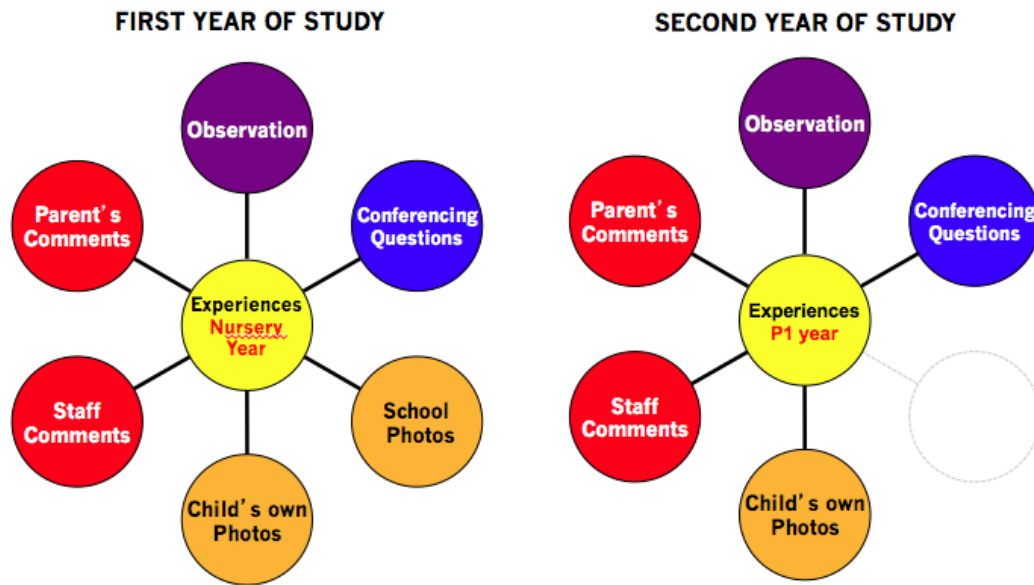


Figure 4-5. The data collection process for children's views over both years of the study

The collected data was then organised into a grid similar to that developed by Clark and Moss (2001) so that the data collected from different sources could be compared and further interpretation considered. Example blank grids for the two periods of the study are given in Table 4-2 and Table 4-3.

In total thirty-three semi structured interviews were carried out across the course of the study. Five of these interviews were with senior managers of psychological services and six with main grade educational psychologists. One psychologist was responsible for two of the case study children. Therefore five main grade psychologists were interviewed, with one interviewed twice about two different cases. Eleven interviews were carried out with parents; six at nursery stage and five at the end of P1. At nursery stage four of the interviews were with the child's mother and two with the mother and father (Case 3, Kevin and Case 5, George). At P1 stage four of the interviews were with the child's mother and one with the mother and

Table 4-2: Grid used to summarise mosaic data-Nursery Year

Area of nursery/school/ activity	Observation	School photos taken by P1s	Adult comments	Child's photos of nursery	Conferencing questions
<i>Library</i>					
<i>Gym hall</i>					
<i>Playground</i>					
<i>Smartboard</i>					
<i>House play area</i>					
<i>Dining hall</i>					
<i>Place to line up</i>					
<i>Cloakroom</i>					
<i>Classroom</i>					
<i>Books</i>					
<i>Marking box</i>					
<i>Drama room</i>					
<i>Sports area</i>					
<i>Drawing</i>					
<i>Magnetic letters</i>					

NB: Italics denote pictures of school taken by P1s. Where the child took a similar picture of their nursery it will be denoted next to the school photo.

Table 4-3. Grid to summarise mosaic data in P1

[illegible]

father (Case 1, Charlie). Eleven interviews were carried out with educational staff; six at a nursery stage and five at the end of P1. In addition there were nine interviews with children using the child conferencing questions (Clark & Moss, 2001), five at a nursery stage and four at the end of P1 (Case 5, George did not have sufficient oral language skills to respond to the questions and was therefore not interviewed). Eleven observations of the children in their usual setting were carried out, six at a nursery stage and five at the end of P1. Five out of six of the case study children were able to engage with using the digital camera, so there were nine sessions where they took and sorted the resulting photographs, five at a nursery stage and four at the end of P1 (At both stages adults working with George felt he would not be able to engage in this part of the data collection process and the author found this to be the case when she observed and worked alongside him). At a nursery stage four out of six children looked at and sorted the photos taken by P1 children of a 'typical' school (George was unable to engage with this process. Hannah clearly indicated that she did not want to do so and data collection was therefore discontinued. This was in line with the author's principle of checking on-going consent and not putting pressure on children to engage if they were unwilling to do so).

Data analysis process

Cohen et al. (2007) state that the main aim of qualitative data analysis is to make sense of participant's experiences and perspectives. They add that there is not one single route or way of doing this as a researcher may be setting out to do a range of things. In this analysis the author was aiming to look at the data in relation to models of school readiness that participant's may hold and how this influenced their decision making. She also wanted to explore and describe the child and family's experiences over time, particularly in relation to transition. The research questions were used as a starting point for data analysis. The author used these as an overall framework for looking at the various data sources and took a thematic approach to the data analysis. This aimed to identify themes from the data and condense the information down to try and make sense of the key factors for each participant. However the analysis also

aimed to preserve the ‘narrative’ quality of each family’s unique experience and identify direct quotes that illustrated this.

Documentary Data

With respect to documentary sources key aspects of these were underlined in the original documents, taking the research questions into account. These points were then summarised into tables in relation to the original research questions.

Semistructured interview data

Semi-structured interview data was transcribed from the audio tracks or from contemporaneous notes. Colour coding for the different groups of interviewees was applied. The author then organised the interview questions into a table in relation to the research questions and cut and pasted the transcribed interviews into the relevant sections. These were read over on many occasions. For the first level of data analysis key points were underlined, with annotations added in the margins as themes began to emerge (see appendix 8 for an illustrated example of this underlining process with some of the data). Each transcript was read over a number of times, on different occasions in this way. For the second level of analysis a further table for each interviewee’s response to questions was then produced. This allowed the data highlighted from the initial underlining to be condensed down into key themes and ideas (see appendix 9 to show how data underlined in appendix 8 was then further condensed down onto this type of table).

For data concerning the decision making process larger tables were then drawn up with the question forming the rows of the table and the source or role of the person concerned forming the columns. This allowed data from key groups of participants to be set alongside each other. The underlined data was then transferred across, condensed further if necessary, and transferred across to this table. These final tables are those that are shown and discussed in chapter 5.

For the longitudinal case study data the produced tables with the question forming the columns of the table and the source or role of the person concerned forming the rows. The tables were organised into sections in relation to the research questions for discussion in chapter 6. The underlined and condensed points emerging from each interviewee were then mapped onto the tables so that all the interviewees perspectives on the question could be viewed alongside each other (see appendix 10 which shows how one part of the data earlier in the appendix was condensed into a table-relevant section is bold, normal text shows condensation from other interviews). In exploring the longitudinal case studies the data for each case is also compared over the two time points. For this study some quantitative data from the children's P1 base-line assessment was also collected and included in the analysis. The author felt that, in taking account of a realist perspective (Robson, 2011), it would be helpful to set some quantitative data beside the qualitative data. This information was also included in the final version of the tables where support and progress in P1 is discussed.

The aim of the tables in chapters 5 and 6 is to display factual details given by the participants', interpretations of these are then developed in the ensuing text and discussion. The theoretical frameworks of different models of school readiness are taken into account and applied when drawing inferences from the data. The author also tried to bear in mind different explanations for the patterns that she found in the data (Yin, 2009).

Mosaic data analysis

Data arising from the mosaic process was also entered and analysed by inserting additional columns to incorporate data from this section. An example of the case study data analysis at this level is given in Appendix 8. The emerging key points were then summarised into a table for later discussion. An example of the case study analysis at this level is given in Appendix 11. An example of one of the tables used for initial analysis is given in Table 4-4.

Inter rater reliability

To check the reliability of her data analysis process author asked a colleague to independently apply the same process she had used to three transcripts of the data, each about separate cases and at different time points. The second rater read through the original transcripts, underlined key points and themes and transferred the key points into a second level analysis table as the author had done. The frequency that similar points were identified and condensed into the second level analysis table by the author and her colleague were then counted and compared. The following formula for inter-rater reliability was used to calculate the level of agreement between the two raters:

Inter-rater reliability = $\text{Number of agreements} \div (\text{number of agreements} + \text{number of disagreements}) \times 100$ (Jindal-Snape & Topping, 2010)

An average of 74% was achieved based on all three of the different sections of the data. The author reviewed the two sets of ratings to look at the nature of disagreements that had occurred and discussed these with her colleague. Some of these had occurred where the author had picked up more pieces of information than her colleague - for example, in 'supports' the author had identified an Occupational Therapist was involved whereas the second rater had not. From discussion with the second rater it was evident that this had probably occurred because the author was very familiar with the data as she had listened to and transcribed it originally. She had also read over the manuscript more often than the second rater who had done the piece of work in a shorter time scale. Other disagreements occurred because the raters had picked up on similar point but put them in different columns on the table. This was particularly the case for 'new skills and progress in relation to original additional support need' and 'social and emotional development.' Although this led to a lower overall percentage of agreement, it still meant that these themes were picked up on and discussed across the case study. The author discussed these disagreements with her colleague who was in agreement with the conclusions the author had reached when she read the data further.

Table 4-4. Example of table used for analysing case study data-Parent's views at P1 stage

Data Source	Positive experiences/ benefits of additional Year	Negative experiences/ issues with Additional Year/into P1	Support	Progress: New skills in relation to original ASN	Progress: Social and Emotional Development	Transition
Interview Data-P1	What impact do you think the additional year in nursery has made on their transition to P1? Would you recommend an additional year in nursery to another parent in your situation? Prompt for detail	Have any difficulties arisen for your child during P1? Prompt for detail. If difficulties arose, how were they reduced/ supported?	What additional support, if any, has your child needed during their P1 year?	What skills have you seen them develop over the course of the P1 year?	How has your child settled into Primary 1 over the course of the year? Scale? How does your child feel about P1 and school?	Tell me about how your child managed the transition to P1 Scale What worked well during the transition? Were there any difficulties with the transition? How well do you think they'll manage the move to P2?
Documentary sources-school	Review Minutes IEP	Review Minutes IEP		Review Minutes IEP Baseline/ progress check	Review Minutes IEP	Review Minutes IEP

'progress in social and emotional development.' Although this led to a lower overall percentage of agreement, it still meant that these themes were picked up on and discussed across the case study. The author was therefore satisfied that the data analysis process used was reliable.

Ethics

At the time of planning this research the procedure for exploring ethics in the author's authority was to put forward a research proposal for discussion by the senior management team of psychological services. The author did this at an early stage and received approval to carry out the research from the senior management team. The author also completed the University of Dundee 'School Research Ethics Approval Form' in consultation with her supervisors. From this and discussion in supervision sessions the following potential ethical issues were identified:

- *Anonymity of subjects and author's authority*

At the outset of the research it was not possible to know what the findings of the research would be. However, as the topic was a sensitive one centering around a decision that could not be reversed once taken, it was agreed to keep the name of the authority and details of those taking part anonymous. This was particularly relevant for the senior management team in psychological services at a time where stating gender would reveal an individual's identity. The designation 's/he' has therefore been used in this section of the write up and the Area Principals numbered to retain anonymity.

- *Collection and storage of digital images of children*

The children in the study were encouraged to take and sort photos of their educational environment. Signed parental consent for their child to do this was sought from all parents of the case study children. However, as a natural part of the process the children also captured images of their peers. The author always checked with educational staff that they were happy for the child concerned to do this before photography started. All staff were happy for this to happen and most noted that 'blanket consent' is sought from parents regarding photographs when children are first enrolled. However, as these images were being collected for a

different purpose, it was felt that it would be unethical to store images of other children. The pictures were therefore downloaded onto a laptop computer, a written note of them taken and any images containing other children were deleted whilst the author was still in the educational setting.

- *Obtaining informed consent and ensuring this is regularly 'checked out'.*

All parents taking part were sent a letter and information leaflet about the study and seeking their consent to take part in the study (Appendix 1). A follow-up letter reminding them of the study and asking for their continued involvement was sent out before the second round of interviews (Appendix 7). Psychological Service, school and nursery colleagues were approached more informally, by email, telephone or face-to-face contact and consent was sought via these media. A further reminder that participation was voluntary and a check that the participant was happy with an audio recording being made was carried out at the start of each interview.

- *Ensuring children were happy to take part in the study and their rights protected*

Gallagher (2010) suggested three key things that researchers should try to take into account when involving children in their research: informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Given the age of the children, informed consent for them to take part in the study was initially sought from their parents. After the first round of parental interviews the author explained to the parents her proposal for seeking the views of their child, checked they were happy with this and obtained their signed consent to work with their child in this way. However, the author also wanted to ensure that the children themselves were happy to work with her so always began sessions in the child's settings with observation so that the child became familiar with her presence before direct work commenced. She told each child that she wanted to find out about what they thought of their nursery or school as part of a study she was doing. The process was explained to the child step by step and every effort made to make the process enjoyable and participatory. If the child indicated through their body language or comments that they wanted to discontinue the activity it was stopped at this point. This was the

case with two of the children at a nursery stage. All children were happy to participate to the end of the process at a P1 stage. The data from this study was anonymised, making it impossible for others to identify who the children were. The author decided that she would keep the children's comments confidential unless the child disclosed something that was potentially threatening or harmful to themselves or others in the process. Given the child's age, developmental stage and additional support needs the author felt that the children would not fully understand this if she explained it to them at the outset. In the one case at P1 stage where a child (Kevin) disclosed something that was troubling him in the playground the author checked with him that he would be ok if she let his teacher know this was something that was worrying him. He gave his consent for the author to do so.

Research Timetable

Time Frame	Activity
October 2007	Initial literature review. Development of research questions and design
January 2008	Submission of proposal for research to Psychological services management.
February 2008	Approval to carry out research received from management team.
August 2008	Request to EPs and search of data bases by support staff to identify current cohort of children having a retained year, Further development of research design
March 2009	Letter seeking consent to take part sent to parents, follow up phone calls (gap in time here partly related to awaiting confirmation from service managers and local authority to carry out research)
April 2009-May 2009	First round of data collection interviews with parents and nursery staff, mosaic work with children
July-September 2009	Interviews with psychological services senior managers and case work psychologists
January 2010	Second letter to parents about continuation of study
May-June 2010	Second round of data collection, interviews with parents, P1 teachers and mosaic work with children
July 2010-date	Analysis and write up of data and report

Conclusion

Using this predominantly qualitative research design the author hoped to generate a rich picture of both the decision making process for retentions and the experiences of families and children during their retained year and into P1. The longitudinal case study nature of the design would help to develop a picture of these experiences over time and across an important transition from nursery to school. An approach for collecting the views of young children with additional support needs was developed as a result of this study. Data was gathered from several different sources and this allowed for triangulation of information in an effort to ensure rigour in the study. A second educational psychologist also carried out analysis of parts of the data so that interpretations made in the data analysis process could be further verified.

The case study nature of the research design carried some risks around issues of generalizability and possible bias. The author fulfilled the role of both participant and researcher in the study, increasing this risk. Steps taken to overcome this have been described in earlier sections of this chapter.

Due to the nature of the population of retained children and ethical issues it was not possible to compare the experiences of ‘retained’ and ‘not-retained’ children. The method developed for collecting children’s views captured the ‘here and now’ of their experience rather than their views on the decision to retain them. There were specific reasons for taking this approach and this will be revisited in the discussion section.

The next two chapters outline the findings from the study. Chapter 5 deals with data about the decision making process, and the data that emerges is discussed in relation to models of school readiness described in the earlier literature review. Chapter 6 looks at data from the longitudinal case studies.

Chapter 5. Results Of The Exploration Of How The Decision Making Process Operates In This Local Authority

Key Research Questions

From the literature reviews outlined in Chapters 1 and 3 and the author's own concerns as a practitioner a variety of research questions emerged. This chapter aims to address the following specific research questions:

- How does the decision making process with regards to retention operate in this local authority?
- What information does everyone take into account during this process?
- How does the data fit with contemporary models of school readiness?

Documentary Evidence

As an initial starting point the author collected and analysed all the available documentary evidence that she was aware of and was provided by the authority about their decision making process for retentions.

Document 5.1: Memo from Local Authority Solicitor to Additional Support Services Manager-February 1997

This memorandum addressed a concern raised by the manager over the legality of a child aged over five remaining in nursery. In answering this question the council solicitor referred to section one of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and argued that in the case of children with special educational needs:

“...the council can assert that it is fulfilling its statutory obligations by providing the extended nursery placement...”

He suggested that the council would be using arguments based on the ‘ability’ and ‘aptitude’ of the child concerned, as opposed to their ‘age’. If a parent were to change their mind about agreeing to an additional year in nursery and instead make a placing request for a school, the solicitor argued, the council could turn down this request on the grounds:

“if the education normally provided at the school is not suited to the age, ability or aptitude of the child”

Document 5.2: Memorandum to Principal Psychologists from Professional Service Managers-October 2000

This is a brief memorandum stating that, from the date of the memorandum, Principal Psychologists have had the authorisation of requests/ recommendations for nursery retentions delegated to them and paperwork related to this should be sent to a named member of central staff. This memorandum is now ten years old. In the intervening period all the Principal Psychologists and the member of central staff named have left the service or retired. Their role has been re-graded to that of ‘Area Principal’ as the authority has gone through several cycles of re-structuring. There is an overall Principal Psychologist but within the service the task of authorising such requests fell to the Area Principals at the time that data was first collected. It would appear that this memorandum has not been amended to take account of these changes.

Document 5.3: Email to Principal Psychologist from Additional Support Services Manager-April 2008

This email addressed the process of decision making in the authority and criteria that the Additional Support Services Manager felt should be applied. With respect to process the professional service manager outlined two options: continuation of the current system, or area principals should send him a ‘recommendation’ and he would take the ‘decision’. The author was not given a copy of the email sent in reply to this, but from later interviews with Area Principals and Principal Psychologist and

their experience of working in the service it would appear that a continuation of the current system was the outcome.

With respect to the process on the ground and criteria to be applied the following points emerge:

- ‘Exceptional circumstances’ for a five year old remaining in nursery need to be established. These should be as follows: “the child’s additional support needs could not be met within P1 or equivalent in special school/class”
- This will be ‘determined’ by the Area Principal on the basis of a ‘multi-disciplinary’ review.

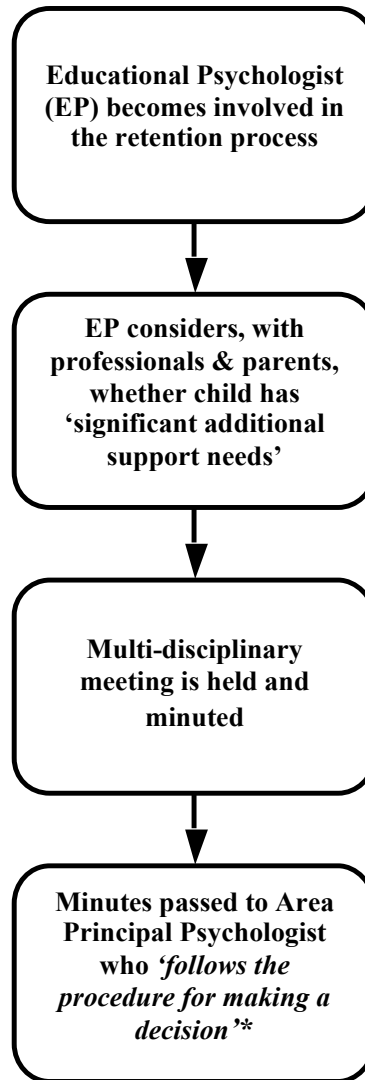
In the author’s view there are some difficulties with these criteria when viewed from an interactionist perspective (Meisels, 1998) of school readiness. It asks educational settings to identify exceptional circumstances where the authority’s usual provision for five year olds would not be able to meet the needs of that child. However, the interactionist model (Meisels, 1998) stresses that educational settings need to consider ways that they can adapt to meet the needs of the child based on their current stage of development and learning.

Document 5.4: ‘Planning Transfer from Pre-school settings to School for Children with Additional Support Needs’ - June 2008

In response to concerns expressed by educational psychologists about children spending an additional year in nursery a guidance booklet for psychologists was produced by the psychological services early years group. The author and one of the Area Principals, who took a lead role on early years issues, were members of the sub-group producing this document. The final version was checked and amended by the Principal Psychologist. The flow chart in Figure 5-1 illustrates the process for retention as described in this booklet.

Key points emerging from documentary evidence

- The legality of retentions had been checked with the authority’s solicitor.
- In this local authority psychological services take a direct role in the decision making process at a case and senior management level.



**NB: This wording is an amendment made by the Principal Psychologist during verification of the final version*

Figure 5-1. Flow chart to show the decision making process based on the Early Years Booklet

- Service documentation suggested that case psychologists should be involved in the decision-making process and a multi-agency meeting held and minuted.
- The final ‘decision’ as to whether a child should be retained had been delegated to Area Principal Psychologists.
- The criteria set by the authority for retaining a child is that their needs should be such that they could not be met in their local school or specialist provision. In the author’s view this suggests that the authority is not taking an interactionist approach to school readiness (Meisels, 1998).
- Most paperwork and guidance relating to this topic is 10 or more years old.

Senior Management Perspective

Using a semi-structured interview schedule in appendix 2 the four Area Principals and Principal Psychologist were interviewed in August 2009.

Decision making process

The first interview question asked how the senior managers saw the retention process operating. Their responses to this question are summarised in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1. Senior Managers’ perspective on the decision making process for retentions.

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
How would you describe the decision making process for retentions in name of LA?	EP has some involvement with child. EP collects information - may be directly through assessment. EP makes recommendation to AP. AP effectively makes a decision	Recommendation comes from parents and professionals on the ground. A decision is reached over time, EP discusses via consultation then observes/ carries out some kind of objective screening. AP offers screening/verification.	EP discusses child’s needs with the nursery. EP Speaks to AP about the issues. AP validates the request. AP writes to family to let them know the outcome. AP informs early years neighbourhood manager.	Process incorrectly devolved to APs. School is informed. Checks with their EP. EP has this endorsed by AP	School identifies child. EP helps everyone reflect on whether retention is the best option for the child. EP clears this with AP. AP informs Head Teacher and key person in local authority

Tensions about senior managers role in and ownership of the decision making process emerged as a theme from the interview data. AP2 described the process as:

“quite piecemeal” (AP2)

S/he reported that it has changed slightly each year from the time when it was initially agreed between an ex-principal and the Additional Support Services Manager. S/he noted that it is in need of change to make it more ‘fit for purpose’ and outlined a plan to meet with the early years team to try to clarify the process following a recent concern expressed by AP3 when asked to be the final decision maker in the process.

AP3 felt that the making of the final decision had been ‘wrongly devolved’ to Area Principals. S/he expressed a frustration about the authority’s current system as follows:

“There are no good standards. There’s no decent policy. The memo’s saying here’s the process. There’s no quality standards. It’s a mess” (AP3)

S/he felt the current policy created a tension for the educational psychologist by placing them in the role of ‘advice giver’ on the one hand and ‘decision maker’ on the other.

“.....puts us in a difficult position. Because we’re saying we give the advice and we make the decision.” (AP3)

S/he believed the advisory role was the more appropriate one for an educational psychologist to take.

AP4 felt that the process had a ‘clear sequence’ and was comfortable with the Area Principal Psychologist in a decision making role and with the system in general:

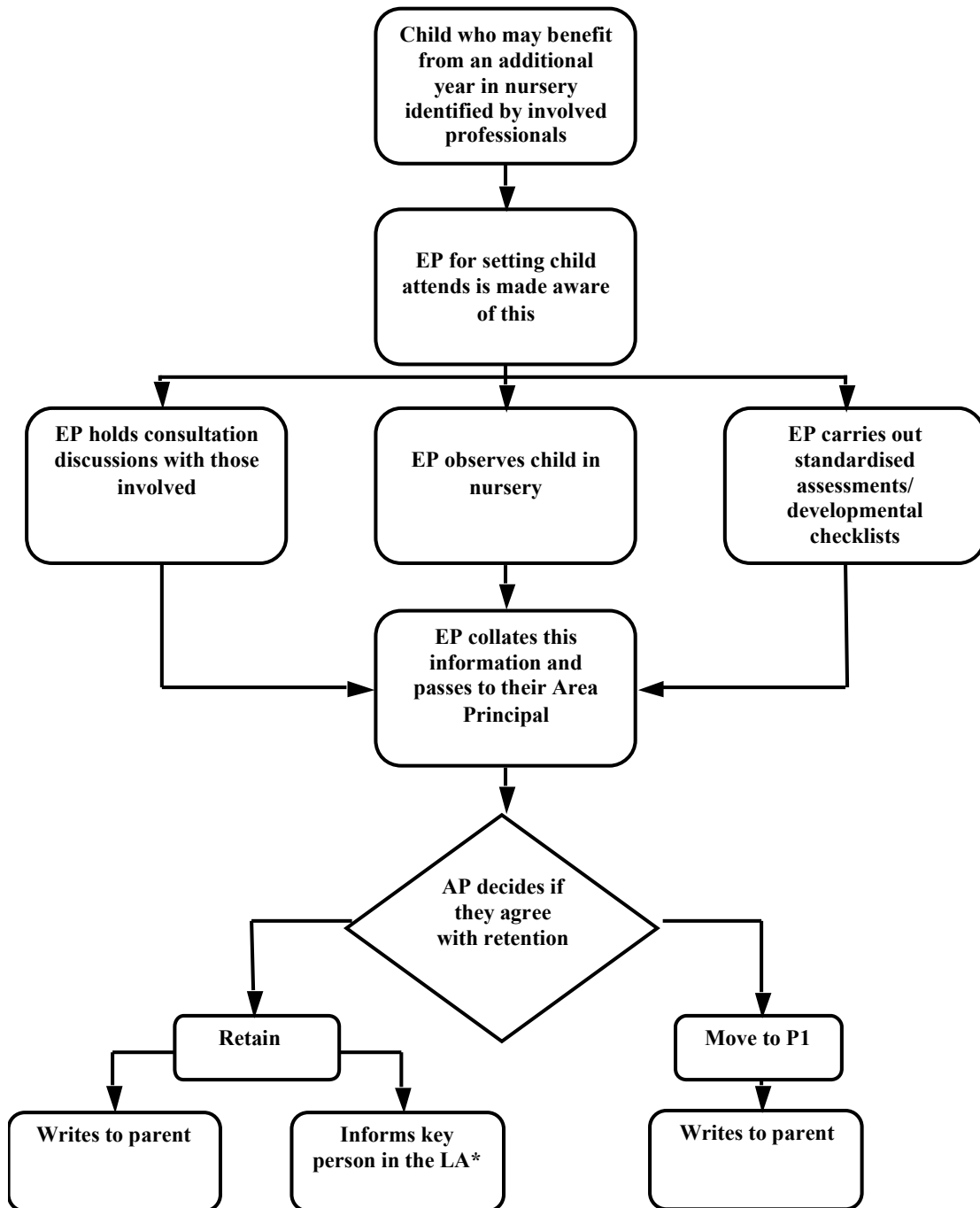
“....yes there’s a role for someone and why not the educational psychologist. We do know things....that system is fine, I think” (AP4)

S/he emphasised that this decision making process was guided by the child’s needs rather than financial constraints. However s/he noted that there was a tension here in the current climate of budget cuts.

The Principal Psychologist was the most outspoken in maintaining that it should not be the Area Principal who makes the final decision. S/he expressed a similar concern about the authority asking an educational psychologist to move from an advisory to a decision-making role as AP3.

From the interview data the Area Principals added more detail to the retention process than is provided in the guidance booklet but also described a slightly different process. The booklet talks about holding a multi-agency meeting to facilitate reaching a decision, but none of the senior managers made direct reference to this in their responses to the interview questions. The flow chart in Figure 5-2 illustrates how the senior managers described the retention process as operating.

The senior managers were also asked about their knowledge of the decision-making processes in other authorities. The responses that they gave are summarised in Table 5-2. The Principal Psychologist, AP2 and AP3 noted that in other authorities a senior education officer, as opposed to a psychologist, makes the final decision. AP4 said that other authorities do not have as high a retention and deferral rate as this authority. The Principal Psychologist and AP3 both said that they preferred the alternative process where an education officer makes the final decision.



**NB: Only some APs added a step of informing a key LA person*

Figure 5-2. Flow chart to show senior managers' description of the decision making process.

Table 5-2. Senior managers description of the decision making process in other authorities

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
How does this authority's process compare with that of other authorities?	Other authorities- school, EP, school medical officer submit reports to senior education officer who makes a decision	Don't know - have only worked for this authority	Quite different - in other authorities an education officer makes the decision.	Based on experience of two other authorities - decision making is owned by officers of the authority. It isn't the role of EP to be a decision maker	Has only worked in Edinburgh - thinks model is similar elsewhere but Edinburgh has a higher rate of retentions

Case Psychologist's role

The senior managers were asked to give more detail about the case psychologist's role in the process. At the time of this data collection the author was a case psychologist in the service. A summary of their answers is given in Table 5-3.

Table 5-3. Senior managers description of the role of the case psychologist in the process

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
What is the case psychologist's role in the retention process?	EP collects information, carries out an assessment, makes a recommendation	EP consults with involved parties, carries out objective assessment, uses knowledge of P1 expectations & speed of progress child is making to help reach a decision.	EP discusses child's needs, current living circumstances, speaks to AP	Make sure everyone understands the implications & school has held a meeting, applying a common standard which is not agreed	EP acts a sounding board/ reflecting back- 'is this in the best interests of the child?'

They expressed different views on the role of the case psychologist when they became involved. The principal psychologist and AP1 saw the case psychologist taking an assessment role and usually having some direct involvement with the child at this stage in the process:

"...it involves collecting information which in some cases may be collected directly by the psychologist through assessment..."(PP)

“...if it’s a retention being involved directly with the child and parent in observation, in doing some kind of objective screening of progress, of developmental stages and of using their knowledge of children in primary one and what the actual demands of primary one would be...”(AP1)

Describing the process in this way indicates that, in order to make a decision on retention, they needed to know about a child’s current stage of development. This focus on the importance of identifying ‘within child factors’ links to maturationist and empiricist models of school readiness (Meisels 1998, Carlton and Winsler 1999). Equally, it could be argued that this knowledge gives a starting point to plan support from either a nursery or P1 context. AP1 indicates more of a social constructivist model (Meisels 1998) when s/he also notes the importance of considering the educational context of P1 and its demands.

However AP2, AP3 and AP4 saw the psychologist in more of a consultation role, “checking”(AP3) the available information or acting as a “sounding board”(AP4) or to “validate the request”(AP2).

“...the case psychologist’s role at the moment is to discuss with nursery you know what additional needs the young person has or the circumstances in which they’re currently living...”(AP2)

“...it’s a police-like role. I think that’s ok for us” (AP3)

AP2’s comment shows some evidence that they are taking more of a social constructivist (Meisels, 1998) perspective by also taking account of the child’s current living situation. AP3 wondered how far a ‘common standard’ was applied across the service and said that s/he suspected it varied between area teams. This suggests that there was not be an established system for moderating requests in the service.

Principal's and Area Principals' role

The senior management team were also asked about their own role in the process, and this is summarised in Table 5-4.

Table 5-4. Senior managers description of their own role in the process.

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
How do you see your specific role as an AP/PP?	As PP I would prefer not to have a role - may discuss a case with an AP to give a second view When in AP role to decide whether to agree or not agree with psychologist's recommendation	Act in a screening/ verification role	Checking, providing back up if EP feels under pressure to agree but isn't convinced retention is best option for the child	Carry out quick double-check that psychologist has covered the ground they should have, make sure school has done the work it should have - if yes to both agree retention	Have a wider awareness of what is going on in the area, compare notes with other APs/ triangulate

It was evident that the Area Principals had different perspectives on their role and different views as to whether it was an appropriate one for them.

AP1 noted that s/he would be verifying that all procedures had been followed, that the criteria were met and the decision correct. S/he did not express a view as to whether S/he felt this was an appropriate activity for an Area Principal Psychologist to be involved in.

AP2 felt that s/he was in a 'checking' role. S/he added that there is sometimes a particular need for this as:

"I have psychologists who find it difficult to say no...they're happy that there is someone else behind them going well. I'm sorry. I don't see a good reason why that should be happening..."(AP2)

AP3 initially described her/ him self in a similar checking role to AP2:

“My job is to do a very quick double-check of has the case psychologist covered what I think the important bits of ground. Have they done it? If they have, I would agree with them.”(AP3)

However her/his overall perspective was different. In the above quote s/he implied that if the psychologist has carried out all the key steps s/he would always agree with what the case psychologist is proposing. When the author probed further on this s/he added:

“I would endorse them; I wouldn’t challenge it, and I think to challenge it I’d be on shaky grounds at times if I didn’t know the child”(AP3)

AP4 talked about the need to have a clear picture of what was happening in her/his area and to compare this with the experiences of other area principals. S/he talked about a need for ‘triangulation’ of information. In a similar vein to AP3 s/he also mentioned that s/he saw her/ himself very much as ‘endorsing’ an application:

“...I have never had a request for a retention from a psychologist that I have not seen as appropriate.” (AP4)

The author assumes that this triangulation goes on in an informal manner, as it has never been explicitly communicated to case psychologists via team meetings, management minutes or service business meetings.

The principal psychologist noted that when s/he was in a temporary Area Principal role s/he had sought the peer support of another Area Principal in checking her/ his decision making process at this point. This may be a similar idea to that of ‘comparing notes’ which AP3 refers to. The Principal Psychologist was very explicit that s/he was prepared to challenge a retention request and brought to the interview paperwork evidencing when s/he had turned one down. When one looks at the interview data as a whole, the Principal Psychologist seemed to show the greatest

level of scepticism about the retention issue. Comments from the Area Principals suggested that generally this would be a course of action that they would endorse and support, though AP3 said that s/he did question some applications.

Information received from case psychologists

The senior management team were asked about the information they currently received from case psychologists and what else it would be helpful to have. The answers are summarised in Table 5-5.

Table 5-5. Senior managers description of the information they received from case psychologists.

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
What kind of information do you usually receive from case psychologists?	EP observational evidence, information from standardised tests, quotes of SaLT tests, report of views of nursery staff and parents.	Brief reports with developmental levels, copy of the minutes of the multi-disciplinary meeting.	Reports from those involved Summary report from EP outlining salient points	The paperwork: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP or ASP • Minutes of multi-agency meeting 	Varies, most EPs write a summary letter but AP would also expect this to be backed up with minutes of multi-agency meeting and evidence of EP input.
What, if any, additional information would it be useful to have?	Clearer view of which of the child's needs would not be met in P1 and why. Indication of how the child will be 'readied' for primary 1	None really, possibly a description of what P1 for that child would look like.	Can't think of anything	A clearer picture of the research/evidence base	You need to know what the parents are wanting and if it was a unanimous decision

There was a lot of variability in the kinds of information the senior managers said they received from psychologists. Looking at the interview data as a whole, there was no one consistent piece of information that they all reported receiving. Three out of five mentioned that they received a minute of a multi-disciplinary meeting. Three out of five said they received some kind of brief report or letter from the EP outlining their input and summarising the salient points. Other received information included

reports from other professionals, information about the views of parents and nursery staff, a copy of an IEP or ASP and observational and standardised test data.

In order to triangulate these responses against other sources the author collected the actual paperwork that case psychologists had submitted when proposing retention for the six longitudinal case studies. This is summarised in Table 5-6.

Table 5-6. Summary of information submitted by case psychologists for the 6 case study children

Source of Information	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Summary report/letter	√		√			√
Minutes of multi-agency meeting	√		√		√	
Email outlining main points					√	

Some variability in information put forward was also evident here. In two out of the six cases paperwork was not submitted, as the case psychologist was not formally involved in the retention process. Where paperwork was submitted, either a brief report/ letter and/ or minutes of a multi-agency meeting had been passed to Area Principals. In this collection of paperwork there were no reports from other professionals, IEPs or ASPs. However, it is important to note that this data only covers half of the children retained in nursery in that cohort, so we cannot know if this is an accurate representation across the service. On reading the paperwork put forward it is evident that information from observation, standardised tests and views of those involved has been incorporated into some of the reports, letters and multi-agency minutes.

Four out of five of the senior management team identified additional information that they would find useful to have from psychologists. The Principal Psychologist and AP1 noted that it would be helpful to have some picture of what the first year of primary would look like for the child in their local school. Their comments here

suggest that a more social constructivist/ interactionist (Meisels, 1998) model of school readiness is being considered. The Principal Psychologist observed that the school was not one of the parties involved in this decision making process and in this comment again gives a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) view of the issue:

“uhmm there’s nobody from the primary school around the table to say: well if he was with us this is what we would be providing. So it’s very one-sided I think.” (PP)

AP3 highlighted the need to link decisions to the research / evidence base. AP4 stressed the importance of knowing the parents’ view and that the decision is a unanimous one.

Parental involvement

The senior management team were asked about evidence of parental involvement in the process. They were also asked about what evidence there was of pros and cons being weighed up with parents. Their answers are summarised in Table 5-7.

Table 5-7. Senior managers description of a parental involvement in the process

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
What evidence is there of parental involvement in the process?	Huge amount of involvement, parents share the worries	Psychologist plays a key role in obtaining parent’s views, often through 1:1 discussion outside review meeting Parents are usually in agreement and have sometimes raised the idea .	Psychologists are all meeting with nursery staff, school staff where possible and the parent	INot clear from the paperwork that the parent had been involved, but AP suspects they had. Good practice would be to hold 2 meetings, 1 st to float idea & 2 nd to finalise.	Aim for a review meeting with parent. Sometimes just a phone call because the parent did not attend meeting.
What evidence do you find of the pros & cons of retention being discussed with the parent/carer?	Rarely evidence of this discussion. Primary school not present at discussion to explore how they could support in P1	Yes, usually an indication that this has happened either at the meeting or prior to it.	A lot of evidence	Little evidence	Happens at a basic level

In all cases the senior management team said that they found evidence that the parent had been involved in the process. This involvement was at different levels: attendance at a meeting or series of meetings; 1:1 discussion with the psychologist; phone calls. The principal psychologist expressed a view that often the idea came from the professionals and the parent was then brought to agree:

“...the parents are very often entirely persuaded that their child won’t manage.” (PP)

AP1 had a contrasting view that in some cases the parent had proposed the retention:

“...the parents are usually in agreement. The parents are sometimes the people who have raised the issue in the first place anyway ..” (AP1)

The senior management team differed widely on evidence that pros and cons had been discussed with the parents. Three out of five suggested that evidence was either little, rare or at a very basic level. Whereas one found there was a lot and one felt there was usually some evidence.

Weighing up of pros and cons

The senior management team were also asked to give their own personal views of the pros and cons of retention. The answers they gave are shown in Table 5-8.

Table 5-8. Senior managers descriptions of the pros and cons of retention

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
Pros	May provide some children with a ‘more secure platform for P1 entry’	Gives child opportunity to mature cognitively & may mean they can succeed in mainstream rather than specialist provision.	May help in ensuring child is able to attend a mainstream school	Kids survive, can make rapid progress and become ready for school	Buys time to try strategies, get a clearer picture of strengths and weaknesses, more thoughtful decision making process about the future
Cons	Child is older in cohort & can leave school before achieving qualifications, their additional support needs increase the likelihood of this.	Bit older than peers may become obvious later on in school, may leave secondary early .completing all their education	Child may leave high school early without completing their full education	Can become bored, appear physically out of kilter with peers, leave secondary school without qualifications	Effect of being the oldest and possibly largest in class, can leave high school early without achieving formal qualifications.

Two main arguments were advanced on the pro side of retention. Firstly, the senior managers described it as giving a child ‘more time’ to progress and become ready for school, to mature, to try strategies, assess needs and facilitate a more thoughtful decision making process. Contained within the descriptions here is some evidence of maturationist and empiricist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) models of school readiness being applied to these situations. Additionally the managers also sided with the idea that a retained year in nursery may offer a ‘gift of time’ (Graue and DiPerna, 2000) both allowing the child time to mature and providing more time to carry out assessments. Secondly, some of them noted that it can mean that the child’s final school destination was in mainstream rather than specialist provision.

All of the senior management team agreed that one of the main cons was a long-term concern that the child might end up leaving high school early before sitting exams and achieving qualifications. In Scotland a child reaches school leaving age when they turn sixteen. Children who are retained will reach their 16th birthday before reaching the stage of sitting final exams in their last year in school. Some of the managers felt there might be a problem with the child being older and bigger than their peers and becoming bored during their extra time in nursery. This could link to the longer term research finding that children who have their school entry delayed experience a higher incidence of emotional and behavioural difficulties (Guevermont, Roos & Brownell, 2001; Stipek, 2002; Wils, 2004).

Criteria applied

The senior management team were asked about criteria that other practitioners applied and also what their own criteria were. Their answers are summarised in Table 5-9.

Table 5-9. Senior managers' descriptions of other professionals and their own criteria

Question	PP	AP1	AP2	AP3	AP4
What criteria do nursery staff, psychologists and other professionals apply when proposing a child would benefit from additional time in nursery?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vague criteria, based on a measure of worry: 'He'll never cope in P1', 'He's not ready for school' • Younger end of age range • Physically immature • Social behaviour immature/problematic • Delayed language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is perceived as immature with respect to: • Social skills • Language • Play and conceptual skills • Toilet training (would rule this one out) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional support needs/something additional happening in the extra year: • Early investigations • Hospitalisation • Something's happened to make nursery time not sufficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is not developmentally ready for school • Often huge language delays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global difficulty • Development across their lives • Development of verbal competencies • Child is not developmentally ready to cope with the curriculum
What criteria do you apply when looking through these applications?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the child be readied for P1 entry? • What will be different for them during an additional year in nursery? • How does this compare with what is on offer in P1? <p>Notes criteria provided by department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptional circumstances • Determined by AP based on a multi-disciplinary meeting • Needs could not be met in P1 or special provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental stages • Social skills • Home circumstances • Unanimity of professional views • Parent might be entering a different education system in the future where children start later • Parents views fully sought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is going to be in place that will give 'added value'? • How does this compare to what would be on offer in P1? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the psychologist • Trust their judgement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View is a unanimous • Proper consultation with parents • Big enough delay in attainment • Clear plan in place to help child make progress and join P1 successfully in a year's time, • Success criteria-child in mainstream P1

The Principal Psychologist felt that the language used by nursery staff and other professionals in arguing for retention was vague and centred around ‘worry’ that a child would be unable to cope and was ‘not ready’ for school. Again, all these terms point to a more maturationist or empiricist model of school readiness being applied (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels 1998) by the professionals in this situation. This point was reinforced by the fact that many of the criteria the senior managers said other professionals were using featured within child delays in a range of areas:

- Young/immature
- Language development
- Social skills/behaviour
- Play skills
- Conceptual skills
- Toilet training (not seen as being very important now)

In addition they noted another argument put forward in support of retention, namely that it provided an opportunity to complete on-going assessments or investigations while the child was settled in a familiar environment.

However, some criteria the managers reported other professionals using linked more to factors out-with the child:

- Less time in nursery
- Change in living situation (e.g. in the case of fostering or adoption)
- Future hospitalisation

This suggests that nursery staff and other professionals also consider that features of the child’s immediate environment play a role, thus indicating a more social constructivist approach (Meisels, 1998; Carlton and Winsler, 1999). There is again evidence that participants regard an additional year in nursery as offering a ‘gift of time’ (Graue and DiPerna, 2000) for maturation or further assessment to be carried out. They appear to argue that nursery might offer a better/ more appropriate

environment for the child than a P1 class in school. This again is more in keeping with a social constructivist (Meisels, 1998) model of school readiness.

In describing their own criteria the managers generally took a more social constructivist (Meisels, 1998) perspective on school readiness. They identified features of the child they would consider, features of the family, features of the child's educational environment and evidence around the process and plans that would be put in place for them. In terms of the child, they said they would consider the developmental stages the child had reached, their social skills and the level of delay in their skills. With respect to the family, they mention the child's home circumstances, level of consultation with parents and the parents long term plans for future education. As for the educational environment, the Principal Psychologist and AP1 had already referred to the need to consider and compare what supports would be on offer in nursery and P1. Finally, they also stressed that any decision should be unanimous between the adults concerned (though no reference was made to children's views) and should be accompanied by a plan for supporting the child during their additional year. Although the managers said that this was something they would look for, interestingly, it was not present in the paperwork that case psychologists had provided to their Area Principal when requesting retention. One manager thought the main success criteria should be whether the additional year led to the child attending a mainstream school rather than specialist provision. When this data was fed back to all psychologists in the service at a CPD event in 2011, several of the psychologists in the audience said that preventing the need to attend special school in the future would be their own main criteria for putting a child forward for retention. In the author's view, using this as a criterion is problematic in several ways. Firstly, it does not take account of the long term negative consequences of delaying school entry, as identified in her initial review. Secondly, children who end up being placed in specialist provision generally have complex needs that are unlikely to be resolved by having an additional year in nursery.

Commenting on their own criteria, some of the managers came up with key questions that they seemed to be asking themselves when viewing applications. These can be summarised as follows:

- How will the child be prepared for P1 entry in the future?
- What will be different for them during their additional year?
- What is going to give the nursery place added value?
- How does this compare with what is on offer in P1?

These questions again suggest that the senior managers may be more attuned to a social constructivist (Meisels, 1998) approach to school readiness, since the questions they are asking here are not about within child characteristics but about the process of supports that could be put in place to further facilitate their development. There was less evidence in the interview data that the managers saw this as a dynamic, two-way process or that settings, parents and professionals were considering what a school should be doing to be ready for the child. Therefore there did not seem to be evidence of an interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach to school readiness being widely adopted.

The Principal Psychologist highlighted what s/he understood the authority's criteria to be from correspondence with the authority:

“children with additional support needs will commence school as per any other children unless there are exceptional circumstances which would mean that the child's additional support needs could not be met within P1 or equivalent special school class.” (PP)

and explained how s/he had applied this to a case when s/he was in an acting area principal role:

“when I looked at [name of child] he certainly met the criteria of worry. He was an under-developed wee boy with delayed language, allergies and so on and I thought: Ok, why would his needs not be met in P1? His needs were so

extensive. Why could we not move him to a special school? That was nonsense. There was no way that a special school was going to be appropriate for [name of child] and I judged that his school education could be provided through P1.” (PP)

S/he concluded by noting:

“This indicates how exceptional the children and families department would regard retention.” (PP)

When the interviewer asked if this criterion was consistently applied across the department, the PP felt that this would not be the case. The author was mindful of this when considering the later case study data, and discussion of this is built into subsequent chapters.

Key points arising from the data regarding senior managers’ perspective

- There were differing views over who should make the final ‘decision’ and whether this is an appropriate role for psychologists at a managerial level to be taking.
- There were differing views as to whether EPs should be making a direct assessment of the child’s needs or having a consultation discussion with those around the child. In cases where a direct assessment was mentioned, this could be seen as evidence of a more maturationist and empiricist (Carlton & Winsler 1999, Meisels, 1998) model of school readiness, whereby the psychologist’s role is to identify within-child factors to demonstrate that they are ‘not ready’ for P1.
- There were different opinions about whether the Area Principals’ role should be to endorse all retention applications or challenge some of them. This appeared to depend on the manager’s assessment of whether the psychologist was putting the

application forward based on their own judgement or under pressure from other professionals or parents.

- Senior managers did not make direct mention of the need for a multi-agency meeting when asked to describe the decision making process, but they did refer to this later when describing information they received from psychologists. Senior managers reported that those working directly with the child (parents, education staff and other professionals) tended to emphasise ‘within child’ criteria as evidenced that they were not ‘ready’ for school or would not ‘cope’ when proposing a retention. This suggested that a maturationist and empiricist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels, 1998) was being taken when applications for retention were made.
- With respect to their own criteria senior managers reported that they would consider features about the child, their family and also the processes and plans for that child in nursery and school when considering retention requests. It is argued that this indicates that managers are generally taking a more social constructivist approach to school readiness (Meisels, 1998).
- Questions were raised about whether the criteria applied are consistent across teams and between Area Principals.
- One observation was that the children and families department criteria are set at a very high level but that this is not necessarily translated into decisions taken on the ground. The Principal Psychologist outlined a specific case s/he had been involved in to illustrate this.
- Variability in the information expected and received when applications were made was evidenced when interview and documentary sources were compared.
- There was a lack of an explicit process for moderating requests, triangulating decisions and tracking the long-term progress of retained children.
- There was confidence overall that parents are involved in the process and have their views sought.
- The Principal Psychologist observed that generally the proposal to retain is made by professionals with parents being ‘brought on board.’ However, one Area

Principal reported that it was sometimes the parent who first raised the idea of retention.

Case EP Perspective

The case EPs for the six case study children were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. In total six interviews were carried out with five psychologists, as one EP had two retained cases: Charlie (Case 1) and Kevin (Case 5). A summary of the questions used and main points emerging from the interviews of the EPs concerned is illustrated in Table 5-10.

The case psychologists had had different levels of involvement in the cases, so it was difficult for some of them to comment fully on the decision making process. Some had been involved throughout and could give a detailed description, but others had to rely on the information recorded on the child's case file or on notes in the school file.

In all cases the nursery staff and parent had been involved in the process throughout. The relevant case psychologist was directly involved in the process in four of the six cases. These psychologists all reported face-to-face discussions with parents and nursery staff and sometimes other professionals. In three of the cases a formal meeting had been used to support the decision making process. Of the remaining two cases the intention to retain was mentioned to the case psychologist in one case and no consultation took place with the case psychologist in the other. This lack of consultation seems to have been linked to the parent concerned not giving consent for a psychologist to be involved at this stage.

The most common parties to be involved in the discussions were parents, nursery staff and the case psychologist. However, psychologists also reported that discussions had included other professionals such as speech and language therapist, paediatrician, specialist peripatetic teaching service and a health visitor.

Table 5-10. Case EPs' perspective on the decision making process

Question	Case 1, Charlie	Case 2, Ella	Case 3, Kevin	Case 4, Oliver,	Case 5, George	Case 6, Helen
What was your role and involvement in this case?	Charlie not referred to psych services - observation in nursery, consultation with staff and parent	Case inherited from a different EP, not referred - as no parental consent, notes of consultation with previous EP	Case inherited from a different EP but current EP actively involved in request for additional year	Case EP throughout	Case inherited from a different EP - end of temporary contract	Case inherited from a different EP but current EP actively involved in request for additional year
Who was involved in the decision making process?	Mum, dad, Head Teacher, Nursery Teacher, EP	From case file appears to be a decision between nursery staff and parents - no one else involved	EP, parents, spectrum, nursery staff, health visitor, VTSS (Spectrum)	School and parents Mentioned to EP as a possible idea	Previous EP, mum, Head Teacher, possibly VTSS	EP, nursery staff, parent, speech and language therapist, paediatrician.
How were views sought?	Via 2 review meetings. EP asked to chair by HT - Encouraged everyone to explore areas of concern, consider how these might be supported in P1 - everyone given a chance to put their views forward Mum at 1 st meeting, dad at 2 nd - emotional experience for mum	Not clear from service records as not referred - just a few notes on school file - consent to refer obtained during 2's additional year	A review meeting in school in November 2007. EP led meeting took role of 'devil's advocate'. Explored areas where 5 didn't seem 'ready' and discussed what support could be put in place in P1 to move these on	Discussions between school and parent	EP observation in nursery, consultation with mum. Early discussions November/December of pre-school year, confirmation in principle at February review, letter from AP confirming in April	A series of informal discussions, EP & mum, EP, mum & nursery staff, separate discussions with SLT and paediatrician
How was the decision reached?	Via 2 meetings, nursery teacher took an active role in guiding opinions - strong view that he 'would not cope' in P1 even with additional support	Not clear from service records - EP suspects informal agreement between parents and nursery	Discussion with parents and involved professionals at a review meeting	Informal agreement between school and parent	Appears to have been via IEP review meetings	Mum clear she wanted an additional year for Helen, everyone in agreement, finalised in March '08 EP contacted AP and early years staff
Pros and cons	EP encouraged exploration of these	Don't know if this was discussed	No record of discussion on file	Not explored, agreement		

Where the case psychologist had been directly involved they reported different levels of involvement with the cases. All had held discussions with parents, nursery staff and sometimes other professionals. Some reported that they had observed the child in nursery. None reported using standardised tests or any other form of individual assessment. This contrasted with some senior managers' views of the information they would expect to receive from the psychologist, suggesting the lack of a well developed channel of communication about the retention procedure or the expectations of managers.

The case psychologists were also asked how the decision was reached. Two approaches emerged. In some cases there was a consensus that the child would benefit from the additional year. This appeared to be based on a kind of 'gut instinct' and driven by an assumption that the best option would be to have an additional year in nursery. This led to a decision to retain without the formality of a multi-agency meeting:

"Mum was always quite clear that she was really keen for an extra year for nursery... We did meet with nursery staff who also felt that and I was certainly feeling that. So we were all feeling that at about the same time. It just began to feel very natural this was what was going to happen" (EP for case 6)

"I think that what led them was that it was so apparent that he was completely out of step with his peers.....which was a feeling shared by everybody." (EP for case 4)

In the author's view the participants concerned seemed to be taking a maturational (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) perspective on school readiness and hold the belief that an additional year in nursery may offer a 'gift of time' (Graue and DiPerna, 2000).

In the second case, there was more discussion and debate, resulting in agreement. One EP reported that the Head Teacher asked her/him to take on the role of presenting the two options as part of a multi-agency meeting:

*“ [name of Head Teacher] asked me just to be the person who would explain: What is a retained year? What are the implications? What are the benefits?”
(EP case 1)*

The same EP reported how s/he actively took on the role of weighing up the pros and cons for a second case in which s/he was involved.

“Throughout the discussion I was always being the devil’s advocate saying; ‘Well you’re saying you don’t think he’s ready here so what supports could be in place in primary one that would, you know, support that?’ So although I tried to do that throughout the meeting, the consensus was that he would benefit from another year.” (EP for case 3)

This EP’s comments suggest that they were adopting a more interactionist (Meisels 1998) model of school readiness. In this same case the EP reported that the decision was very much driven by the nursery teacher:

“She was insistent that we all understood that Charlie would not cope. She’d already decided.” (EP for case 1)

This strongly expressed conviction of the nursery teacher seemed to influence the decision making process and suggested that they might have been adopting more of a maturationist or empiricist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) model of school readiness, emphasising the belief that Charlie would not be able to ‘cope’ in P1 rather than considering what adjustments could be made to enable him to manage:

*“We had that discussion. The **responses were typical**: well even if I could put that in I still think he wouldn’t cope. So that’s the words people were using...coping, they didn’t think he’d cope” (EP for case 1)*

The EP for Charlie and Kevin was the only one who reported that there had been an active exploration of the pros and cons. However s/he added that s/he felt s/he was the only one taking this view and others at the meeting rejected the ideas that s/he put forward:

“... The obvious one of when they get older there are implications; that if they want, they could end up leaving school without formal qualifications. The comment was: Well [EP’s name] [name of child] is on the spectrum. I don’t think it’s probably relevant to talk about him doing qualifications. And we have to say we don’t know; he’s only four and a half. We don’t know what he’s going to be able to do at that point. So that’s really how the discussion went.” (EP case 3)

In exploring what may have persuaded the others in the meeting not to explore pros and cons s/he observed that:

“There’s just this received wisdom that, of course, they’re going to benefit from an extra year.” (EP for case 3)

This ‘received wisdom’ appears to be challenged by the research base discussed earlier. Where the impact of delaying school entry has been followed up in the longer term by international studies (Graue & DiPerna, 2000, Stipek 2002) the finding is that an additional year in the earlier stage of education does not seem to have a long lasting benefit.

Key points arising from the data on case EPs’ perspective

- Not all the EPs had been directly involved in the retention process.

- The most common parties that EPs reported as being involved in the process were themselves, the parent and nursery staff.
- Case psychologists reported that they had observed the child in nursery and carried out consultation discussions with those involved. They did not mention using standardised tests or developmental checklists.
- Sometimes a decision to retain was reached informally through a series of discussions with different people over time. In other cases discussion and debate took place through a more formal multi-agency meeting.
- In one case the decision to retain seemed to be very much driven by the views of the nursery teacher.
- Only in one case did the psychologist report that the pros and cons of retention were actively discussed with all those involved. This applied to two of the case study children.
- The EP's comments about the decision making process seemed to indicate that different models of school readiness were favoured by themselves or by other participants in the process. There was evidence that maturationist, empiricist and interactionist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels, 1998) models of school readiness were held and applied by the EPs themselves.

Parental Perspective

The parents for the six case study children were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. A summary of the questions used and the main points to emerge from the interviews of parents are shown in Table 5-11. All parents reported that they had been actively involved in discussions leading to the decision for their child to have an additional year in nursery. Nursery staff were usually mentioned first as having played a key part in the discussion and decision. In line with the case psychologist's perspective the parents of cases 2 and 4 did not mention the EP as having been involved in the process. All the other parents named the EP as someone who had played a key role in the process. In one case the parent perceived that the case was presented to the EP who was then responsible for making a decision as to whether funding was available. Mention was also made of involving speech and

Table 5-11. Parents' perspective on the decision making process

Question	Case 1, Charlie	Case 2, Ella	Case 3, Kevin	Case 4, Oliver	Case 5, George	Case 6, Helen
Who was involved in the decision making process?	Decision led by nursery teacher, views of speech therapist, doctor, EP also consulted, head teacher involved	Nursery teacher & parent	Specialist peripatetic teaching service,, nursery teacher, EP, speech and language therapist.	Nursery teacher, mum & dad	Specialist peripatetic teaching service , EP, nursery teacher, parents	EP & mum, dad involved in 'relayed' discussions.
How was your view sought?	Idea proposed by nursery teacher, discussion between mum, nursery teacher & other professionals	Idea proposed by nursery teacher, discussed with mum	Mutual agreement of parent and nursery staff that this would be beneficial	Discussion with nursery teacher, parents in agreement	Process led by mum, seeking views of involved professionals	Idea given as option by EP, parents favoured this/ gave their consent
How was the decision reached?	On-going discussion, review meetings, parent felt case had to be presented to EP & saw them as being responsible for the funding.	Parent unable to recall detail of this	Meeting in school where issue was discussed and a decision reached	Informal discussion parent, nursery teacher, views of speech therapist sought.	Discussed with EP. EP observed 3 a few times, said to parent he agreed and that he would write it up and submit a request	EP visited home, agreement reached between mum and EP, EP submitted request
Were pros and cons explored?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Almost	Yes	Yes
Pros	More time for assessment to clarify needs further Time to increase confidence	Better to do it whilst was at nursery than once at school	Better to hold him back a year	Will bring him along better More prepared for school	Time to get ready for school, increase possibility of managing in mainstream More appropriate peer group/finds it easier to bond with younger children	Happy at nursery/fits in well Good social interactions with nursery peer group Nursery offers continued flexible child care
Cons	He might leave school before completing his education	None mentioned	Referred to but not specified	Will be one of the tallest in the class	Being the oldest. Friends moving on. In 3's case mum felt he was not aware of these things	Greater financial cost of child care, wouldn't want Helen to be in same year group as younger brother

language therapists, a specialist peripatetic pre-school support service for children with ASD, paediatrician and head teacher.

When parents were asked about how their views were sought, a picture emerged where different parties were responsible for first proposing the retention. In three cases the parents reported that nursery staff made the suggestion.

“...the nursery teacher, and she suggested ehmm that possibly we could keep (name of case 1) back a year because she didn’t feel he was ready to go...”
(parent of case 1)

“Again it was (name of nursery teacher)” (parent of case 2)

“We did talk about it with the nursery teacher and we could see ourselves that he would benefit, you know” (parent of case 5)

in one case the parent felt it was a mutual idea

“It was probably both ehmm we really both sort of felt that he would have benefited from the extra year ...” (parent of Case 3)

and in one case the parent noted that the EP first proposed the idea:

“(name of EP) started speaking to us about (name of Case 6) going to school. Well the possibility of her going to school or that she could possibly have another year at nursery.” (parent of Case 6)

In one case the parent felt that the additional year in nursery was what she wanted and that she had actively led the process. This parent had reported at the start of the

interview that she was a teacher and it is possible that she was drawing on her own experiences of the classroom in thinking through the situation for her son:

“I think that basically it felt like it was my pushing for the extra year because I really did not think he was at all ready for any form of schooling...” (parent of case 5)

In two out of five of the above quotes the parents made specific reference to either their own or nursery staff's view that the child concerned was 'not ready' for school. This suggests that within-child factors are being focused on as the main measure of readiness and therefore that a maturational/empiricist model (Carlton & Winsler 1999; Meisels 1998) is being adopted. In three or four of the six cases the idea seemed primarily to have been raised by nursery staff, which fits with the Principal Psychologist's view that parents are brought round to the idea by nursery staff. However, in one case the parent raised the idea and sought support from others involved which is more in keeping with API's point that sometimes the parents themselves propose the idea. The unexpected response here is the one instance where it would appear that the EP was the person to present the idea.

Discussions between the parent and nursery staff were described as going on over a period of time. In two cases the parents reported that this led to a more formal meeting in school where the final decision was made. In three cases the parents described the decision being made informally as a result of periodic discussions. In one case the parent could not recall how the final decision had been reached.

All parents reported that there had been a process of weighing up the pros and cons of making the decision. In the two cases where parents said a formal meeting was held they reported that this had been part of the meeting. In some of the other cases weighing the pros and cons seemed to be part of the discussions the parents had had with each other. The pros that parents identified centred on giving more time for assessment, to clarify needs and to help their child be more prepared for school.

These again seem to link closely to Graue and DiPerna's (2000) finding that those in favour of delaying entry saw it as offering a 'gift of time' to further develop a child's skills prior to school entry. Some parents also said nursery staff had mentioned that the nursery peer group offered their child better opportunities for social interactions. One parent, based on her experience with her older son who was retained once he was in school, also mentioned that she felt it was better to retain in nursery than once in school. Parents also identified some cons around an additional year in nursery. One parent said there was an increased risk that her son might leave school before completing his education. Others saw problems with their child being the oldest and tallest in the class and experiencing their peer group moving on ahead of them. One parent said there had been an increased child care cost for the family and she would be concerned if the retention led to her child being in the same class as her younger sibling in the long term. In addition one parent said she had needed to give her son an explanation why he was continuing in nursery. This was mainly because he was one of twins and was aware that his sister had gone on to join P1 with their nursery peer group. In describing the explanation that she offered to her son she showed evidence of a maturational (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) perspective of child development and school readiness:

"We just explain that he was a very tiny wee baby when he was born and so on and he needed more time to grow." (parent of case 1)

Key points emerging from the data on parental perspectives

- All parents reported that they felt actively involved in the decision making process.
- Nursery staff were mentioned first as the key people in this process, then the psychologist, where one had been directly involved.
- Parents' views of who had first proposed the idea varied between nursery staff, a mutual idea or the parents' own proposal and in one case that of the EP.

- The parents saw the decision emerging as a result of a series of discussions with different people over time. In some cases they reported that this was then finalised through the formality of a multi-agency meeting.
- All parents reported that they took part in some kind of process of weighing up the pros and cons of the decision. Sometimes this seemed to be on a more informal basis, and only two parents reported that it was discussed at a multi-agency meeting.
- In exploring both how and who first raised the suggestion of an additional year in nursery and the pros of this additional year there was evidence that mainly maturational and empiricist models of school readiness (Carlton & Winsler 1999, Meisels 1998) were being adopted. Linked to this was an argument that the additional year in nursery might offer a ‘gift of time (Graue & Di Perna, 2000) for the child to progress or for assessments to be completed.

Nursery Staff Perspective

Nursery staff for the six case study children were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. In each case the author asked the nursery manager/ head teacher to identify who would be the most relevant member of staff to speak to. Because of this staff holding a variety of different positions in the settings were interviewed and this is reflected in the table below. A summary of this data is shown in Table 5-12.

Staff interviewed in the nursery settings held a range of positions. In four out of six cases they were nursery teachers and reported either working directly with the child or having an overview in co-ordinating support and planning for them. In one case the Deputy Head Teacher, who also took on the role of Additional Support for Learning Team Leader, was interviewed. S/he put her/himself forward for this when the purpose of the research was explained as s/he had had a co-ordinating role in the decision making process. In the partner provider setting the child’s key worker and manager of the playroom were interviewed.

Table 5-12. Nursery staff perspective on the decision making process

Question	Case 1, Charlie	Case 2, Ella	Case 3, Kevin	Case 4, Oliver	Case 5, George	Case 6, Helen
What was your role and involvement in this case?	Nursery teacher & child's key worker Responsible for planning, liaising with learning support teacher, developing IEP.	Nursery teacher- not key worker. Oversee everything, do paperwork, liaise with outside professionals and parents.	Nursery teacher & key worker. Supported transition from child and family centre, liaison with other professionals and mum,	Additional Support for Learning team leader, have an overview of nursery and sometimes support in nursery	Nursery teacher, work with child as part of group, involved in review meetings, support learning assistant	2 members of staff interviewed - 1 was Helen's key worker and worked directly with her, the other took an overview of staff and activity in the room
Who was involved in the decision making process?	nursery teacher, mum, learning support teacher, nursery nurse team	nursery teacher, parent, speech and language therapist, support co-ordinator.	Child psychologist Spectrum; teacher and speech and language therapist, parents, learning assistant	School staff, EP 'off the record', parents	head teacher, nursery nurse, psychologist, speech and language therapist, parents	Staff were unclear about this/ didn't recall fully - saw mum in a lead/liaison role with regard to this
How were views sought?	Informal chats over time	Discussion at a review meeting	On-going discussion at multi-agency meetings	Informal discussion	Through discussion at review meetings	Mum told staff of plan for an additional year and they gave their views
How was the decision reached?	Opinion formed, put to parent, decision taken together	'almost a spur of the moment decision' at a review meeting	On-going discussion at multi-agency meetings	Nursery sent discretionary deferral request paperwork centrally, this was returned as child too old, informal decision made	Idea came from mum, choices presented at meeting & mum felt that she would like 3 to have additional year in nursery	Staff were unclear about this/ didn't recall fully
Were the pros and cons explored?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Through on-going discussion	Yes - in relation to different school options (language unit or special school) or another year in nursery	No/ don't think so.
Pros	'...based on what was best for Charlie...the downsides of that didn't outweigh the positives of him staying'	'The balance was in favour of her staying in nursery school'	'emotionally he was not ready to go to school'- additional time in nursery seen as offering an opportunity to support this	4 had missed a lot of their ante pre-school year, additional year allowed a fuller nursery experience	Mum saw an additional year in nursery as a way for George to develop socially, make friends and links in the local area.	
Cons	Child was a twin and sister would move to school without him	Much taller than her peers.	Parents had concerns; size in relation to peers, being aged 6 at school entry, holding back his learning as academically 'ready' start school	Felt parents were initially resistant to the idea.	Less speech and language therapy support available in nursery, Larger group sizes in nursery than the other settings considered	

In five out of the six cases, nursery staff reported that they and the parents had discussed the idea of an additional year in nursery either informally over time or more formally in a review meeting. The exception to this was staff in a partnership nursery setting who reported that Helen's mother presented the idea to them following a discussion with the EP. At this stage they expressed their support for the proposal.

Nursery staff reported that a range of other professionals were involved in the decision making process, including the psychologist in all but one case, speech and language therapist, peripatetic pre-school teaching service for children with ASD and support co-ordinator. The head teacher and or ASL Team Leader were also identified as taking a school overview in three of the cases. Hannah and Myant (2002) found that head teachers in pre-school setting reported consulting a similar range of stakeholders when considering retention, though in their survey particular emphasis was placed on consulting the EP and less emphasis on consulting directly with nursery staff.

In four out of the six cases the staff reported that there had been some kind of review or multi-agency meeting where the decision had been finalised. In the case of the partnership provider, no kind of meeting was held, as noted above. In Oliver's case (Case 4) the member of staff said s/he had found the process for requesting a retention unclear. S/he had submitted an application using the authority's deferral paperwork, but in fact this only applies to children who had not yet reached the age of five at the start of a school session. As Oliver was older than this, the papers were returned by head quarters with an explanatory note. On receiving this, s/he made an internal and informal decision to keep Oliver in nursery for an additional year.

In five out of the six cases nursery staff said there had been some discussion of the pros and cons of taking this decision. In these cases issues in relation to each child were explored in more detail. When discussing the 'pros' of having an additional year in nursery, staff in some cases made reference to specific within-child factors.

Kevin was described as not being emotionally ready for P1. Nursery staff reported that George's mum felt he needed the opportunity to develop his social skills by interacting with younger children. These perspectives again suggested that some staff were adopting maturationist and empiricist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels 1998) models of school readiness. The Additional Support for Learning Team Leader in Oliver's school reported that the child had missed a lot of his ante-preschool year and therefore needed more time in nursery. This again fits with the idea that delaying school entry offers a 'gift of time' (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). Interestingly, staff in Kevin's nursery outlined a range of concerns the parents had which the parents did not mention in their own interview. In Oliver's case staff felt his parents had been resistant to the idea, but again this was not mentioned by his parents when they were interviewed.

Key points arising from data on nursery staff perspective

- In all but one case nursery staff reported that they took an active role in the decision making process with parents.
- The process for requesting a retention was not clear to all nursery staff. Generally it was arrived at/ or finalised during a multi-agency meeting.
- Nursery staff reported that there was a process of weighing up the pros and cons. In discussing this they highlighted reservations that the parents had at the time but which were not always reflected in the parents own interviews.
- Often nursery staff expressed views indicating that they held maturationist or empiricist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998) perspectives of school readiness for the children concerned.

Overall Summary

In this authority psychological services were directly involved in the decision making process for retentions at both a case and senior management level. Amongst the senior managers there were different views as to whether it was appropriate for them to be making a final 'decision'.

Despite psychological services being given this key role, EPs were in fact not involved in the retention process for two of the case study children. In one case this was because the staff were unclear as to how the decision-making process operated and had followed a different, incorrect procedure. In the other case the parent had not given her consent for the EP to be involved, so the EP could not participate in the process. Parents and nursery staff saw the decision as resulting from discussions over time. The pros and cons of retention were not always formally discussed or recorded. However, parents and nursery staff said this kind of discussion did occur as part of discussions that they had over time.

Both documentary and interview evidence indicate variability in the type of information case psychologists passed on to senior managers. Individual senior managers had different expectations as to whether the EP's role should be a consultation or assessment one and on the information they would expect to receive. There was no explicit process in the local authority for triangulating or moderating the decision making process or for tracking retained children in order to judge the long-term impact of this decision.

Senior psychological service managers were confident that parents did have their views solicited and indeed named this as one of the criteria they applied when checking the information received from case psychologists. In their own interview data parents said they had felt fully involved in the process. The most common parties to be involved were parents, nursery staff and psychologists; though there were reports of other professionals being involved on the periphery of the decision making process. Interestingly, there were two key parties who were not usually involved in the process. Firstly the child's future primary school (although in the case of children in nursery classes attached to their future primary school the head teacher was sometimes involved and therefore it could be argued that they were representing both parties) and secondly the views of the child themselves. In this study the author aimed to find a way to explore the child's views. Additionally, the content of the discussions on a retention did not appear to examine what adaptations could be made

to meet the child's needs in a P1 context. For this reason the author felt there was less evidence overall that an interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach to school readiness was being taken.

The Principal Psychologist felt that the idea of retention came mainly from professionals, with parents being brought on board. The interview data from the case studies did seem to support this view. Parents named nursery staff as playing a key role in the retention decision-making process. The majority of parents reported that nursery staff first raised the idea of retention. In the two cases where this was not the case, it had occurred either at the parent's request or was first raised by the case EP.

The data showed evidence that Scottish participants in this study were guided by the different models of school readiness that they held, as outlined in international research. Some parents and nursery staff responses suggested that their decision making process may have been influenced by a maturationist or empiricist model of school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels, 1998). The models that seem to have influenced psychologists' decisions varied widely: in some cases EPs seemed to have taken a maturational or empiricist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels 1998); in one case the EP appeared to take a more interactionist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998); and the senior managers seemed to have taken a social constructivist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels 1998).

A stated criteria for retention had been given by the authority and circulated to all psychologists. However the PPs' view was that this was set at a very high level of exceptionality. Several managers questioned whether criteria were consistently applied across teams and between Area Principals. They felt that parents and professionals used a variety of within-child and external criteria when making a decision to retain. Asked about their own criteria, the managers noted that in addition to within-child and external criteria they would consider processes and plans put in place for the child concerned. Conversely, plans for what would be put in place to

support the child's progress during an additional year in nursery did not seem to be discussed between participants as part of the decision making process.

One emerging view from some psychologists in the service was that retention was an appropriate intervention if it prevented a child from needing to be placed in a special school setting. Hannah and Myant (2002) reported that, based on informal discussions they had had with EPs in their service, they shared this same criteria for retention. Unfortunately, they do not give precise numbers of the EPs who express this view, so it is difficult to make a direct comparison. Hannah and Myant (2002) also reported that several head teachers in their study felt that retention was not appropriate if a child needed more specialist provision. Exploring the cons of retention, the nursery teacher in George's case expressed this concern and said she felt he would have had more access to the speech therapy and specialist support he needed had he moved to a specialist setting. These two Scottish studies seem to highlight a similar dilemma: on the one hand some professionals argue that a retained year in nursery could prevent the need for specialist provision in the longer term, but on the other hand practitioners' experience sometimes suggests that, if a child would benefit from special provision, it is better that they move there sooner rather than later. This Scottish dilemma seems to fit with the 'theft of opportunity' that Graue and DiPerna, 2000 note can be the downside of retention. Additionally, it suggests that participants are not considering or trying out supports in a mainstream environment before moving on to consider specialist provision.

Chapter 6. Results of Longitudinal Case Studies Of Children Who Had a Retained Year in Nursery

Introduction

This chapter will outline the findings from five of the six case studies in relation to the original research questions. Case study six and her family emigrated to Australia

early in her first year of school, so it was not possible to collect a full set of longitudinal data. The data from her nursery year has been used in Chapter 5 but a decision was made not to use it in this chapter due to its incomplete nature.

The case studies will be discussed in turn, ending with a summary of main themes. The chapter will finish with a concluding discussion of the themes emerging from all the case studies.

Each case study will be discussed under the following sub-headings:

- Biographical data
- Perceptions of the progress made during the retained year in nursery and during the first year of school
- Perceptions of the positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and P1
- Perceptions of the negative experiences/ issues of a retained year in nursery and P1
- Perceptions of the child's transition experiences
- Summary

Tables have been used to summarise and give a visual picture of the data. Data arising from the author's interpretation of the mosaic methodology has been included in tables alongside data on adults' perspectives. An example of how initial analysis of the mosaic data was carried out for this summary is included in Appendix 10.

Some quantitative data was available about the children's attainments from the authority-wide monitoring and tracking process. At primary school entry and at the end of a child's first year in school all children's literacy and numeracy skills are assessed using a standardised authority baseline and progress check assessments. Children are given an individual 'baseline assessment' in August/ September of P1 (a child's first term in school). This assessment is administered on a 1:1 basis either by their class teacher, the learning support teacher or a trained learning assistant. The

‘progress check’ test in May/June (the child’s third term in school) is usually delivered on a group basis. These results are recorded on an authority-wide database. The tests are standardised based on the expected age of the school population: 4 years 6 months to 5 years 6 months for the baseline assessment and 5 years 4 months to 6 years 5 months for the progress check. This causes a problem in accurately measuring the performance of this group of children, as they were all aged 6 years and older when they started school and were 7 years and older by the end of their first year. To give some kind of comparative measure, their raw score has been set against the equivalent standardised score of the oldest child in the sample.

Charlie- Case Study One

Biographical data

Charlie was one of fraternal twins born at 36 weeks. The two twins and their older brother all lived at home with their mother, a support worker for the elderly and disabled, and their father, a shelf stacker at a DIY store. Charlie’s mother said that he met milestones late and had difficulty with weaning and independence skills. During Charlie’s pre-school year his mother reported that there were issues in his communication, interactions with others, concentration, early number skills and pencil grip. At the end of Charlie’s pre-school year the nursery teacher said she was concerned about his low confidence. She reported that he was aware that his peers were ahead of him and he tended to favour the company of adults. She observed that his peers lost patience in listening to him and felt this led to him preferring his own company and solitary play. The case EP observed Charlie in his preschool year and noticed that he did not initiate interactions and ‘played like a younger child.’ On the basis of these views a decision was reached at a multi-agency review meeting in May 2008 that Charlie would have a retained year. His sister joined P1 with the rest of their age cohort in August 2008. In August 2009 Charlie joined P1 in the same school as his nursery class when his twin sister was in P2.

Perceptions of progress made during the retained year in nursery and in the first year of school

Table 6-1 and Table 6-2 offer a summary of the progress Charlie was perceived to make during his retained year in nursery and at the end of his first year in school.

During Charlie's retained year, support and targets for him were planned through an individualised education programme (IEP). Reviews were held between nursery staff and his parents to monitor his progress. At the end of his retained year, staff and parents felt that Charlie had made progress. The IEP and review minutes supported this. Charlie achieved most of his IEP targets in October 2008 and review minutes reported that he developed new skills. In particular, changes were observed in his confidence, communication, fine motor and early cognitive skills. He made a first friendship with one other child and was more confident about making contributions in larger group situations. His nursery teacher described her perspective of this:

"...Before [i.e. prior to retained year] we'd do show and tell and he'd want to do it and he'd come and stand in front of the other children and you'd ask him questions about it and he'd say 'I'm not telling you' or 'it's a secret'. He wouldn't know what to say whereas now C's show and tell could go on all morning, if you'd let him..." (nursery teacher at time point 1)

Charlie's mother was confident that he had made progress but noted that this was not consistent across all areas:

Table 6-1. Support and progress during Charlie's retained year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 1: Interview data from parents	-Some Asperger's strategies -OT & SaLT assessment -OT group (summer) -Fidget toy -Nursery programme -Added to medical SN register	-More confident -Concentration slightly better, still needs adult alongside -Can count to 10 -Speech clearer -More willing to try things -Has definite likes -Follows instructions better -Asks for help	-Had a specific friend -Related better to younger children -Would talk in a small group of children -At end of additional year mum felt Charlie was happy and in a world of his own
Time point 1: Interview data from nursery staff	-IEP -Advice from Occupational Therapist (OT) & Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) -Regular review meetings -Homework club -Regular contact with mum	-Fine motor skills improved -Now finds adult and talks audibly -If he doesn't want to do something, he still won't or will do half heartedly	-Made friends with 1 boy - chat/spend time together -I think he'd say he's enjoyed the additional year in nursery
Time point 1: Interview data from EP	-Possibly audit support -More of the same -Monitoring of progress -SfLT involved in summer term	-Difficulty in separating this from progress that would have been made had C gone to P1; if continued improvement made in nursery, no evidence that this would not have been made in P1 too. We can only say he's improved in these things, not whether it is an extra year nursery that has made a difference	
Time point 1: Documentary sources	Review Minutes: still needs to target a few speech sounds	Review Minutes: good language development, more confident with motor control IEP targets: Oct '08 5/7 targets achieved, 2/7 not achieved - no further evaluation info given.	Review Minutes: more confident with sociability and concentration
Time point 1: Charlie's views as expressed through mosaic data	Observation - spent most time with adults, was able to focus on a task for 5-10 mins when adult was with him, 1-2 mins when on his own.		Named teacher as favourite person, one peer as someone who he doesn't like. Observation: mostly on the edge of activity watching others. Photos: Took pictures of groups of children and individual. Groups sorted under ☺ single child under ☺ (may relate to activity)

“I mean, I do see an improvement in him. He has in some areas had slow progress and in other areas he’s just blossomed. He is a different child from last year at this time.” (mother at time point 1)

The EP observed that Charlie had improved but that this could not necessarily be directly attributed to his retention in nursery:

“All you can say from the objective evidence that nursery has collected is he has improved in these things. You can’t say whether, had he gone into primary one, he wouldn’t have made similar improvements.” (EP at time point one)

Table 6-2 describes a range of different supports that were put in place for Charlie in school; the main one was being part of a small group of delayed school entry children receiving a modified curriculum. In October 2009, towards the start of Charlie’s P1 year, the planning frameworks used for him were changed from an IEP to an additional support plan (ASP). The latter framework is one that the authority usually recommends when there is less need for individualised planning for a child’s needs. In review minutes, it was noted that Charlie did not need individual support from the support for learning teacher. When the author worked individually with Charlie in school to collect his views, he was able to sustain attention to the tasks for longer than previously and gave fuller and more carefully thought-through answers to the conferencing questions. All of this suggests that Charlie made progress during his first year in school.

Some quantitative data about Charlie’s progress was also available from the authority’s baseline and progress check assessments (see introduction of this chapter for a fuller description of these). The maximum age for a standardised score on the

Table 6-2. Support and progress for Charlie during his P1 year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 2: Interview data from parents	-Learning assistant -Support for learning teacher -ASP -OT assessment and group in summer before P1 -SaLT assessment and programme -Paediatric review	-Now walks up and talks to family members -Specific preferences for toys -Tells an adult what he wants -Reading -Writes name -Copies small words -Pencil grip improved -Can select and record TV programme	-Has a lot of friends -Settled well -Less passive, voice heard in house -Mum back at work -Sense of working jointly with school to address issues -At end of P1 mum reports that Charlie really likes school, is happy and enjoys going.
Time point 2: Interview data from P1 staff	-Part of a group of 5 delayed entry following modified programme in P2 class -Constant reminders -Asking him to rub out and redo work if it's not his best -Daily handwriting -Dictating story/adult scribes -Sees SaLT & OT	-More independent, doesn't need constant reminders/back up from an adult -Good listener -Good at problem solving -Good aural skills -Developing average/ low average literacy and numeracy skills for a P1 child	-No specific friends -Relies on adults -Loner -Likes routines -Loves school -Feels valued -First to greet adults -First to volunteer for show and tell
Time point 2: Documentary sources	-Oct'09 - Euro pens/cross cutters, needs reassurance, change of IEP to ASP, monitoring by SFLT. -May 10 - much support still required but big improvement since the start of the year. Continue with fine motor development, independence, encourage social development through clubs, and continue to monitor progress. OT referral, dyspraxia and phonological difficulties being considered.	-Oct'09 - Working confidently and independently, enjoying success in learning his keywords -Oct'09 - IEP no longer needed replaced with ASP, also noted to not need individual learning support. -May 10 - Fair progress with language, less so with maths. -P1 ASP -Learning outcomes re fine motor skills, independence, and interaction with peers. -Baseline 18 literacy, 12 numeracy Progress check (P1) 29 literacy, 27 numeracy	-Oct '09 - Sflt observed C in programme and noted that minor issues re socialising still apparent but improvements in this area also. -May 10 - likes routine but less of a worrier, still has concentration issues.
Time point 2: Charlie's perspective	Said he disliked not reading with his friends and only having 2 people in his group. Said he found maths and reading difficult.	Rates 67% of school photos with ☺ Was able to sustain concentration and focus on conferencing questions and photos for longer than at time point 1. Gave fuller answers to all questions.	Names both teachers and a male peer as people he likes. Smiles, makes eye contact and talks to boy next to him during a literacy lesson.

city's baseline assessment is 5 years 6 months. Charlie was aged 6 years 4 months when he started school, so only a raw score was provided. Looking at the standardisation tables, a child at the upper age limit of 5 years 6 months for this assessment would get a standardised score of 95 (39th centile) for literacy and 95 (37th centile) for numeracy. If this is used as a broad guide, Charlie's score on the baseline seems to fall within the average range for the oldest child at school entry. The maximum age that a child can gain a standardised score on the P1 progress check is 6 years 5 months, and Charlie was aged 7 years 1 month at the end of his first year in school. Looking again at the standardisation tables for the upper age limit of the assessment, the oldest child achieving these scores would have a standardised score of 76 (5th percentile) for literacy and 74 (4th percentile) for numeracy. This would suggest that by the end of P1 Charlie was doing less well in his early attainments and now falling below the average range expected for a child of his age. However, the progress check assessment is considered a less effective measure by staff in the authority, as they report that young children find both the group administration and content more challenging than the baseline. In the current session (2011-2012) the authority has discontinued the use of this assessment in light of these criticisms. In addition, Charlie's reported difficulties in speech and language, motor and attention skills were likely to have impacted on his score, particularly since it was administered on a group basis. Interview data from school staff suggested that by the end of P1 they saw Charlie's skills as falling into the average/ low average range in relation to his class (non retained) P1 peer group.

The interview data threw up a conflicting issue around the development of Charlie's social skills. Charlie's parents reported that he made lots of friends, but the P1 staff had a different perspective, saying he did not have specific friendships and continued to be a bit of a loner. This different perception may be because school staff and his parents held a different concept and expectation of 'friendship.' Parental comments suggested that they saw Charlie as knowing and having a group of children who he spoke to and related with, whereas school staff seemed to hold more of an expectation

that Charlie would develop one or two specific friends. Charlie himself mentioned one male peer as someone he liked and also expressed a dislike of some children in the groups he had been placed in.

A picture emerged that Charlie had made progress during his first year in school but continued to have additional support needs in some areas. The following quote from school staff illustrates this:

“...considering that his baseline score was so low and it can only go up, his fine and gross motor skills are still lower They’re looking into dyspraxia, that’s a definite area of need that still stands out...He’s definitely improved, he’s learning all the time. Again it’s so hard with that group; [referring to delayed entry peer group], he’s progressing very adequately, average to just below in relation to expectations for the primary one group. Not a bad place for Charlie, considering...” (P1 staff at Time point 2)

There are some elements of this quote that are concerning in terms of the expectations that school staff seemed to hold about Charlie. Quantitative data suggests that when he entered school his baseline score was within the average range, not low as staff express here, but that by the end of P1 his scores were falling below the average range. Overall, there does already seem to be an expectation that he and this group of delayed entry children are likely to make a slower rate of progress than their peers. This discontinuity may have been further highlighted for staff by the fact that they were part of a class of children the same age as them but who have had an additional year in school. This observation is also reflected in the earlier quote from school staff ,where it is noted that Charlie and his peers ‘stand out’ in relation to the other children in the class.

Perceptions of the positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-3 summarises the main themes about the positive experiences and perceived benefits of Charlie's retained and P1 year from the interview data and the author's interpretation of the mosaic data at two time points.

An emerging theme was that retention offered more time for assessment and support of Charlie's needs and created individual time with his mother. This idea of more time being needed to allow skills to develop fits with the maturationist model of school readiness discussed earlier (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels 1998) .

Charlie's mother said that the retained year contributed to Charlie having a positive attitude towards school at the end of P1. She reported a sense of working together with the school. This finding is encouraging in relation to the opposing findings of Hannah et al. (2010), where parents said they felt there was a lack of information and communication with school, and Russell (2005) where the parents of children with disabilities felt they did not have a clear picture of what was being done to support their child in school. This difference may have occurred because Charlie's mother had an existing relationship with the school both through Charlie's attendance at the nursery class linked to the school and because Charlie's siblings already attended the school. P1 staff and the EP suggested that, although Charlie had made progress, there continued to be issues for him as he entered and moved through P1.

The mosaic data offered a picture of Charlie's view of positive aspects of nursery and school. At nursery his sorting of photos suggested that he liked the garden, snack and book areas. In P1 he rated the art area, outside area, smart board, magnetic letters and board and some classroom games positively. He expressed interests in art and playing outside at both stages. In P1 Charlie gave a positive rating to more of the photos he took than he did in nursery. This could be because he felt more positively

Table 6-3. Case study 1-Perceived positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery for Charlie

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of positives from child's mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Had been properly assessed in all areas -Gave time for everyone to understand difficulties -Allowed time to prepare school staff/make them aware of C's needs -Difficulties were clarified before he went to school 	<i>Nursery staff</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gave C an afternoon just with mum (NB. mother later reports this as problematic for her) -C enjoyed this time, talked about what they'd done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -General impression, made improvements but still issues -Parents were pleased -More mature -Interacted better -Language improved -Can only say he's improved in these things, not whether it is an extra year at nursery that has made a difference 	<p>Said favourite place is art room and liked the garden best</p> <p>Sorted 12/24 (50%) photos ☺</p> <p>These included photos of different activities in the garden, snack area and sofa/ book area. Chose to spend time in snack area and outside</p>
Time point 2: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Allowed time for others to get involved/ OT assessment -Ready for P1 challenge -Would recommend an additional year in nursery to another parent in a similar position -Allowed time for C to 'get there' -Meant he had a positive attitude to school -Shared understanding of needs with school -Sense of working together 	<i>School staff</i> <p>Huge impact, could have done with more time in nursery, helped develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social skills • Being able to follow rules • Confidence • Social and personal aspect of curriculum 		<p>Said favourite place was playground and liked doing art best. Sorted 16/24 (67%) photos ☺.</p> <p>These included photos of smart board, magnetic board and letters, art table, outside area, table trophy, books, toy money and classroom games.</p> <p>Observed during a whole class, adult-directed literacy activity, facial expression was neutral so hard to gauge how he felt about this.</p>

about school but it may be that he had a better understanding of the task on this second occasion or was more inclined to take photos of the things that he liked.

Perceptions of the negative experiences/issues of a retained year in nursery and P1

A summary of the negative experiences and issues emerging for Charlie during his retained year in nursery and P1 are given in Table 6-4. Charlie's mother said he was aware of his delayed entry and frequently asked why his sister had gone to school before him. She said this had made her give the explanation that he was just a tiny baby who needed to grow more. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this explanation would seem to link with the maturationist model of school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels 1998). Charlie's mother did not share nursery staff's view that extra time with her in the afternoons was a benefit. She said that he was bored and being part-time in nursery slowed his progress and prevented her from seeking paid employment. At the end of nursery and P1, staff highlighted continued additional support needs for Charlie.

There was an issue about class groupings for Charlie and his cohort. He and other delayed entry peers were put into a composite P1/P2 class with four other children who had already been in school for a year. They were part of this class for most of the time but joined the P1 group for literacy lessons. The rationale was that they were closer in age to the children in the P2 class, but school staff noticed that this created tension, as their ability and needs were more in line with the main P1 group:

“Putting him into the P2 class, in hindsight, is not as good as putting him into just primary 1...I think the children in the older class can be more mature and able and that can highlight your own inadequacies and I think that's true of that entire group because they were all held back for a reason. So I feel consequently it's highlighted more; they stand out.” (Learning assistant at time point 2)

Table 6-4. Perceived negative experiences/ issues during an additional year in nursery for Charlie

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of Child's negatives from mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of issues with a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Frequently asks why twin sister was in school, not him -May want to leave secondary early in future, mum feels basic family value of education will prevent this -Nursery place morning only: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1)C bored in the afternoon, won't play independently 2)Mum unable to seek employment 3) May have slowed progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Perseverance with tasks still a worry -At home asks why twin sister is at school and not him - Nursery Teacher (NT) thinks he'd like to stay another year in nursery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Decision influenced by who P1 teacher was -Catchment/Nature of school influenced decision -NT pro delaying entry -In another cluster school C may not have been put forward for retention 	Said that he didn't enjoy drawing and doesn't like the school part of nursery. Rated 33% of photos ☹, these included the school area in nursery and school dressing-up clothes, some displays in nursery and toy trains. Spent less time indoors on activities here, but a sunny day and most children were outside.
Time point 2: Perceptions of issues with a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recently a bit bored with homework -Bit of a problem with maths -Upset when reading buddy changed -Attention span still shaky -Gross motor skills -Chews on things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Socially-still relies on adults. A bit of a loner -More orientated to P1 children but placed within a composite P1/P2 class as part of a smaller P1 group of pupils who had had their school entry delayed -Still issues with motor skills, dyspraxia being explored 		Commented that he comes to school because he was held back a year. Said he disliked not reading with his friends, lots of boring things like maths and only having 2 people in his group. Didn't like inside of school and found maths and reading difficult. Rated 17% of photos ☹; piece of writing, maths cards, reading book, computer & listening station

Charlie's view of things that he did not enjoy changed between nursery and P1. At the nursery stage, possibly because the data collection was undertaken just before his move to school, he expressed a dislike for parts of the nursery that were orientated towards helping children prepare for school. At the school stage he reported a dislike of the groupings that he found himself in and of specific activities such as maths. His comment about groupings linked with school staff's identification of this issue, showing triangulation of the data sources. Charlie rated 33% of the photos that he took in nursery negatively, but this reduced to 17% rated negatively at the school stage. This may be because he felt more positive about school, but equally he may have understood the task better or was more orientated towards taking photos of things that he liked. The EP highlighted a number of other factors that she felt had influenced the decision to retain him. These included characteristics of staff, the school and the catchment area. Interestingly, she noted that he might not have been put forward for retention had he been in a different school in the cluster.

Perceptions of Charlie's transition experiences

Table 6-5 gives information about Charlie's transition experiences and the possible impact of his additional year in nursery on them. Charlie's mum described him as having mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension just before his move into P1. Charlie allocated a 'don't like' rating to parts of nursery aimed at preparing him for school and sorted less than half the pictures of a school under a 'like' category. This fits with Dockett and Perry's (2005) findings from their research with children and additionally suggests that the technique of actively involving Charlie in the process of taking and sorting photos allowed an exploration of his feelings and experiences. Ten months after the move Charlie's parents felt that the move to school was made successfully. This was also reflected in Charlie's data, where he put 67% of his own photos of school under a 'like' category and changed some school-based equipment/activities from a don't like/ neutral to a 'like' category once he was in school.

Table 6-5. Perceptions of Charlie's transition experiences

Data Source	Feelings before move to school	Difference additional year likely to make to this move	How the move went	What worked well during the transition	Any difficulties?	How will he manage the move to P2?
Time points 1 and 2: Parental interview	-Excited -Apprehensive	-Just a molehill to climb, not a mountain -Curriculum will be a challenge, but not too hard -OT assessment now carried out -Less risk of behavioural difficulty	-Really well -No tears or worry -Excited -More than ready for it	-School and parent keeping in touch -Nursery staff taking C to visit school whenever possible -Parents speaking positively to C about school -Having siblings at school already -Knowing several cohorts of children from nursery -Always been part of the school	None	-Work could be harder -On-going attention difficulties might affect this -Carry on working together
Time points 1 and 2: Nursery and school staff interview data	-Hasn't decided if he wants to go yet - thinks it's up to him -Will be fine with visits and familiarity	-More confident- will approach an adult when he needs to -Can explain what's happened when things go wrong -Asks for help -Will talk appropriately in front of peers in structured situations	-Fitted in. No problem at all	-Having sister in P2 class -Knowing school's expectations	-Not really -Motor skills still need support	-Don't anticipate a problem -Still not on average scale for social interaction -Won't cause a fuss -Need to continue to encourage confidence
Time point 1: EP interview data	-Aware of going to school -Excited (dad's report at review)					
Time points 1 and 2 Author's interpretation of Charlie's perspective using mosaic data	Gives nursery photos of school area and dressing up ☺, says he doesn't like school building in conferencing questions, 47% of school photos ☺ and 41% ☹		At a school stage sorts 67% of his photos under ☺, continues to like smart board, in school reports liking magnetic board and letters (☹ nursery), also changes 'general books' from ☹ to ☺.			

Staff and Charlie's parents identified a number of things that helped to make the move to school successful. The retained year in nursery was seen as giving him an advantage in terms of already knowing many children in the first two classes of school. This fits with the findings of Stephen and Cope's (2003b), Margett's (2006) and Hannah et al. (2010) research where children and adults identify that having friends/known some children can support transition. Additional visits to the school, moving to the school that the nursery class was based in and having siblings at the school already were seen as other supportive factors. In Charlie's case his nursery teacher had reported that she had involved him in extra visits to school and in taking 'messages' and it would seem that this, alongside the school's existing programme for universal transitions, may have helped create a purposeful transition programme which contributed to his progress in P1 (Burrell & Bubb, 2000; Fabian & Dunlop 2006). As Charlie moved towards P2, his parents and staff felt that he would manage this next transition successfully, although his on-going needs and the perhaps more difficult work were identified as possible future challenges.

Summary

Nursery staff and parents felt that the additional year in nursery was beneficial for Charlie and that he made progress during it. The main thing it was seen to offer was 'more time' both for assessment of Charlie's needs and by giving him time alone with his mother in the afternoons. Charlie's mother perceived the nursery staff's 'benefit' of having time alone with him in the afternoons as a problem, both for his learning and progress and her own ability to seek employment. These conflicting views reflect the complexity that the multiple perspectives placed on meeting Charlie's needs and planning his transition. Charlie was reported to have had a successful transition to school and a number of supportive factors were identified in relation to this. These fitted with some of the findings from the research evidence base.

Some issues arose during the additional year and into school. As a twin Charlie was reported to be constantly aware of and asking why his twin sister had started school

before him. Due to his age at school entry he was placed in a small P1 group within a P1/P2 composite class that matched his chronological age but were one year ahead of him in terms of time spent in school. In retrospect, school staff reported that this arrangement was not beneficial, and Charlie himself expressed some dislikes about the groups he was part of.

Charlie engaged with the methods developed to capture his views. His participation and engagement in this improved at the school stage. The data resulting from this sometimes matched with data from other sources but also offered a unique insight into Charlie's own perspective on things that sometimes contradicted the views of adults. For example, at the nursery stage adults reported that Charlie felt excited about moving to school, whereas Charlie's own sorting of some of the photos he took relating to school suggested he was feeling apprehensive.

Charlie's EP highlighted wider issues about whether the same rate of progress might equally have been achieved had Charlie entered P1 with his age cohort. She also noted that a child with Charlie's profile might not have been put forward for retention in one of the other cluster schools.

Ella-Case Study Two

Biographical data

Ella was the younger of two children living with her mother, a single parent and artist. The EP reported that Ella's mother had had some mental health issues during Ella's ante pre-school year. Ella and her brother had a reduced attendance at their educational settings during and after this period. Ella attended a playgroup initially then joined the nursery class attached to her local primary school in December 2007. Nursery staff reported that Ella's spoken language seemed limited and she did not always seem to understand what was asked of her. They also noted that Ella became easily frustrated and at these times would throw things and become hard to settle. They observed that Ella tended to play by herself and only wanted to engage with activities of her own choice. As a result of these concerns nursery staff said they

made referrals to other professionals, but the feedback they got from these was that appointments were not always attended.

Documentary sources cover assessments carried out by both the Speech and Language Therapist and Community Paediatrician during Ella's pre-school year. From these assessments, her communication and early cognitive skills were falling well below the range expected for a child of her age. However, this information needs to be considered alongside Ella's unwillingness to take part in activities not of her own choosing. This reluctance may well have applied to these assessment situations, so the scores may represent an inaccurate measure of her actual skills. Ella's difficulties in her early communication fitted with Murray and Harrison's (2011) reported finding that vocabulary skills can be an indicator of school readiness which can also be shown to impact on later progress in literacy attainment in school. However, in the author's view this is less an indication of Ella's readiness for school and more a clarification of areas where support for her should be targeted. If an interactionist approach (Meisels, 1998) is adopted in looking at Ella's needs, it should be equally possible to plan a programme of support in this area in a nursery or P1 environment.

In the March of Ella's pre-school year a review meeting was held, and the minutes of this showed that staff were concerned about how she would manage the move to school. Staff reported that she would not be able to sit, listen and cope in the more formal environment of the classroom. In her interview data Ella's mum also described Ella at this time as just wanting to play and not being ready to sit down and learn in school. These comments suggest that the adults concerned are taking an empiricist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998) on school readiness. Their comments suggest that they perceived a set of skills that Ella needed to develop before she was 'ready' for school, rather than looking at how the school could adjust to meet her learning and development needs at its current stage (interactionist perspective, Meisels, 1998).

At the meeting where these concerns were raised, Ella's mum was reluctant for nursery staff to refer Ella to the EP, so an informal decision was reached without the EP's involvement or the usual authority process being followed. The nursery teacher was not sure why Ella's mum was unwilling to give her consent for EP involvement, though her later comments suggest that she was also not engaging with speech therapy support offered at this time. In September 2008 Ella's mum gave her consent for the EP to become involved. At the end of Ella's additional year in nursery she joined a P1 class in the school that her nursery class was attached to.

Perceptions of progress made during the retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-6 and Table 6-7 offer a summary of the support that was put in place and the progress Ella was perceived to make. Given the issues with Ella's attendance at appointments in the previous year, support was planned differently during her retained year:

"...things were kind of taken up or organised in a way for people to deliver it direct to Ella without relying on her mum to take her....Support was organised differently and people tried to be more creative in ensuring that she got it..." (EP at time point 1)

One of Ella's primary identified needs was in the area of communication skills, so this was important with respect to her accessing speech and language therapy. The therapist was able to visit her in nursery, and staff followed up programmes set using learning assistant support. They also followed through the EP's suggestion of creating regular opportunities for Ella to talk on a 1:1 basis with an adult. This intervention plan appeared to be successful in supporting the development of her skills. All adults around Ella were able to give examples of where they had seen progress in her skills,

Table 6-6. Support and progress during Ella's retained year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 1: Interview data from parents	-Full time nursery place -Speech Therapist -Mum not aware of ASP -Visits to P1 with other nursery children	-Will sit and listen to stories, etc. -Language skills have greatly improved, putting sentences together, speech therapist pleased with progress	-Says goodbye to a number of different children -Probably not aware that she's had an additional year in nursery.
Time point 1: Interview data from nursery staff	-Learning assistant (5 hours) -SALT suggestions -VTSS group -ASP -1:1 talking time with adult -Visual timetable -EWO -OT referral	-Language skills have improved -Finds it easier to understand nursery rules and routines. -Finds it easier to move onto something else, even when not an activity of her choosing	-Interaction with peers has improved, words go backwards and forwards. -Doesn't seem to be aware of having had additional year in nursery -May be aware that she's older than other children, but children are usually proud of this.
Time point 1: Interview data from EP at time point 1 (nursery)	-Firm line re attendance -SALT etc. in nursery -Nurturing relationship built with family -Play therapy discussed -EWO, LA, VTSS	-Initiates conversations now -More involved in projects in nursery, making connections between nursery and home -Nursery more part of her life -Staff recognise Ella's skills and capabilities	-More confident in approaching and interacting with other children. -Not sure if she is aware of being oldest, certainly biggest in the 3-5 year old group -Physically large but a younger child inside
Time point 1: Documentary sources	-ASP -Review meetings on several occasions	-Transition record - following rules, listening and concentrating for longer -SALT report: improved grammar scores on formal assessment carried out in April and December 2008	
Time point 1: Author's interpretation of Ella's perspective using mosaic data	Observation, Ella sometimes seeks out adults to show them her work or what she's doing. Smiles when adult responds/ gives praise.	-Is able to verbally let author know when she's finished with the interview: 'That's enough now, ok!'	-Play is mainly solitary during observation -Names female peer as favourite person in conferencing questions

while the formal speech therapy assessment in December 2008 (during her retained year) showed her making progress in her grammar score.

Other areas of identified need for Ella were to develop her interactions with her peer group and help her learn to take part in activities that were not of her choice. The nursery teacher described support here:

“...Of course, we set up a visual timetable to control sections of her day and to encourage her to go to places that she may not have wanted to go to...to put her into the house corner and interact with others with support.” (nursery teacher at time point 1)

The interview data and documentary analysis seemed to show that these aims were achieved during Ella’s retained year in nursery. All adults reported that she now interacted more with her peers, and Ella named one peer as her ‘favourite person’ in the conferencing questions.

The psychologist had some remaining concerns about whether the planning process had been as thorough as it could have been:

“I’m not saying it was a bad decision for Ella, but maybe if it had been documented a wee bit more, then we could have had clearer goals. We could have had many times where we could have said: Look, you know attendance is a major issue here. At what time when it doesn’t improve are we going to take action, because it went right on until...just before Christmas.” (EP at time point 1)

She added that it would have helped to involve Ella’s mother more in some of the tasks and targets set for her. This statement is further supported by the fact that Ella’s mother’s interview data suggested she was not aware of the ASP that the nursery had

put in place for Ella. Ella's own request for homework provided an opportunity for staff to do work in this way later in her retained nursery year. Finally, she felt that, given the mother's mental health issues and Ella's experience of them, there were some emotional needs that remained unmet at the end of the retained year:

"...She's seen things a girl her age usually wouldn't have done, but mum's put a shutter down over it...She'll be seen as a vulnerable child." (EP at time point 1)

The psychologist noted that play therapy had been discussed as a possible way of supporting this but felt that there was a gap in services for meeting this kind of need. She wondered whether Ella's interest in art and time spent on this type of activity might have offered an informal opportunity for her to explore some of these feelings.

Table 6-7 describes the supports that were put in place for Ella once she was in school and the progress she made during her first year of school. Interview and documentary analysis suggested that progress in the original identified areas of need (communication skills, interaction with peers and following adult-directed tasks) continued to be made. Ella was observed to be able to follow class routines, give relevant answers to questions and to acknowledge and rate her peers positively. Her mother and class teacher also felt that she liked school. This was supported by the positive ratings that Ella gave most of the photos of school that she took.

However, as predicted by her nursery teacher, Ella continued to have on-going additional support needs in school. The baseline assessment given to all P1 children at the start of school showed Ella's numeracy and literacy scores were falling well below the average range expected for an older child at school entry. At the progress check stage at the end of P1 her standardised and centile scores were lower than they had been at the start of P1. Issues with the group nature of this test, Ella's own

Table 6-7. Support and progress for Ella during her P1 year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 2: Interview data from parents	-Outreach Speech and Language Therapy -Learning assistant in class but not specifically for Ella -Not aware of an ASP	-Has maintained interest in books and desire to do homework -Brings book bag home regularly	-Is able to engage others in play -Has made a best friend. -Aware of being older than others but sees this as a good thing -Feels fine about school, enjoys it
Time point 2: Interview data from P1 staff	-Learning assistant support -ASP -Works with support for learning teacher -Small focus groups for all curriculum areas	-Listens to instructions better -Numeracy skills developing, literacy skills at an early stage -Finds change to a different teacher on a Thursday difficult	-More positive play -Gets on better with other children, has formed specific friendships -Engages with adults and some peers. -More positive since Christmas, quite likes school
Time point 2: Documentary sources	-School ASP. -June review meeting and minute	-Progress in self organisation and vocabulary -Joining a reading group -Increased ability to listen in class -Baseline - Literacy raw score 5, standardised score 71 3rd centile, numeracy raw score 4, standardised score 76, 5 th centile (NB standardised estimate due to age) -Progress check (P1) - Literacy-raw score 22 standardised score 70, centile score 2, Numeracy-raw score 10, standardised score 70-, centile score 2-. -Achievement in literacy, block 1 knows 6/26 initial sounds	-has friendships in class
Time point 2: Author's interpretation of Ella's perspective using mosaic data	Ella watched the teacher and others closely when instructions were given. She smiled when she received praise for a correct answer	-Ella was able to follow class routines when observed - putting litter in bin, going to sink for a drink -She got changed from her PE kit independently -Ella put her hand up and offered a relevant answer during a class discussion about a maths task -She needed a 2 nd individualised reminder to follow some instructions in class	-Ella sat on the edge of a group of girls during PE, sucked her fingers and watched them. She didn't join in with the conversation. -Ella smiled and acknowledged peers in class when she took photos of them -Photos of class peers rated ☺, names 3 peers as people she liked in conferencing questions

additional support needs and continued reduced attendance (70% during P1) would also have impacted on her scores here. Documentary analysis showed that Ella had learnt 6 out of 26 letter sounds by the end of P1. At the June P1 review meeting the support for learning teacher confirmed that she had been involved in supporting Ella's literacy skills, and some discussion on ways to address this took place. Ella's mother felt that the phonics teaching approaches used in school and the letter name emphasis from her own experiences and places such as TV had contributed to Ella's difficulties:

"...That's what I'm trying to sort of reinforce with Ella...I may well wander off into big words, you know, big letters because of the phonics' of course...I think that's where she's getting muddled, because she's skipping from one to the other... We're the only country that does that - there's no other country."
(mother at time point 2)

However, in the author's view Ella's early difficulties with speech and language skills are also likely to have affected her literacy development, in line with the findings of Murray and Harrison (2011).

Ella's class teacher reported that Ella's numeracy skills were developing better than her literacy skills. This is not reflected by the baseline and progress check assessments, but her teacher said it was evident from her work in class.

School staff revised the ASP for Ella to target support during P1. The support was mainly orientated towards addressing communication and interactional concerns and it would be hoped that, as a result of the review at the end of P1, more of a learning focus was taken for this in P2. Although the author observed that this was not discussed at the review meeting, the rate of Ella's progress in acquiring literacy skills and her on-going needs could suggest that this should be amended to an IEP. Ella's

mother said she was not aware of the ASP but was trying to help Ella with her learning at home. The EP summed Ella's needs up in the June 2010 review meeting:

“Ella’s longer-term difficulties are now clearer and ready to be addressed. Support for these needs to be continued” (Author’s own notes taken at the review meeting NB Author was not case EP)

In Ella's case her additional support needs would appear to continue into P2 at a level that is requiring on-going support from the school. The additional year in nursery would therefore not seem to have enabled her to 'catch up' in her learning and development, but the adults around her said it had helped to clarify her needs and she had made progress in the areas of original concern.

Perceptions of the positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-8 offers a summary of the main themes around Ella's positive experiences and perceived benefits from a retained year in nursery and in P1. Ella's mum felt that Ella had benefitted from the retained year for several reasons. Firstly, it met Ella's need to have more opportunity to play:

“If they want to play...they’ll learn in their own time” (mother at time point 2)

This comment would suggest that Ella's mother saw an additional year in nursery as offering 'more time' (Graue & Di Perna, 2000) but did not see play as a process through which learning also develops. Secondly, she felt that it was better for an additional year to occur at a nursery rather than a school stage. Explaining this in more detail, she drew on her son's and her own experiences of school. She said that her son had found the move to school challenging. To try and support this he was withdrawn from P1 for some of the time and placed in the nursery class. Problems for him emerged again later in school:

Table 6-8. Perceived positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and in P1 for Ella

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of positives from mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Created more opportunity for play, which Ella needed - Now more prepared for school, asking for homework - Brother had an additional year in school, negative experience, better that it happens in nursery 	<i>Nursery staff</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everything came together when attendance was good - Staff more aware of/understanding E's styles and thinking - can interpret - Creative strengths emerged, had more opportunities to do this kind of thing in nursery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big differences, has made a lot of progress during the retained year. - Initially staff had felt she might need special provision but this changed as progress was evident. - As attendance improved got into a routine, accessed support, built relationships with staff and peers. 	<p>Ella says her favourite place in nursery is the toy whales and water tray and that she likes playing best</p> <p>Rated 47% nursery photos ☺ These included pictures of the art and craft area (3), computer, water tray (2) and books (2)</p> <p>Ella is observed to play in the arts, crafts area, dressing up and using water tray</p>
Time point 2: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nursery structure more play based, less conformist, suited Ella. - Let her play, she'll learn when she's ready - Massive, would have been lost in P1 a year before - Better to do it in nursery (refers to E's brother) - Mum was oldest in school, not an issue 	<i>School staff</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher has only known Ella in primary school but notes that staff who knew her in both settings feel she has benefited and improved as a result of the retained year. 		<p>Ella says her favourite place in school is the minibeast cave and that on her best day in school she made a technology kit and used all the pieces.</p> <p>-Gave 94% of photos ☺ These included minibeast cave and toys (5), dolls house, construction kit, art work (3), art area, class photo, reading words, peers doing maths</p> <p>-Observed during PE and maths lesson. Neutral facial expression, frowns when she is told to wait to get a drink.</p>

“...he was taken from, what year was it?, primary 3 or 4, and put back and that was devastating for him...because at that stage in life and that time umm they’re aware, you know, who’s around who and who they are friends with, you know...” (mother at time point 2)

Her mum felt that this would not be Ella’s experience:

“...Having that extra year in nursery and coming through with everybody, it’s not ...I really do feel it’s the best way to do it” (mother at time point 2)

She also drew on her own experiences of school:

“I was late to school myself because of my age...I just missed the intake so I was five and a half...so I was one of the oldest in the class...I never saw it as a problem. That’s just the way it was...” (mother at time point 2)

With this series of statements about her own and her son’s experiences of their relative age in school Ella’s mother appears to be developing her own narrative of what age means in relation to learning. This is a similar pattern to that found by Graue et al. (2002) when they interviewed parents about their reasons for choosing to delay their child’s school entry.

Nursery staff felt that, once Ella’s attendance improved, things started to come together for her. As a result they developed a better understanding of her style and needs:

“I think we’re realising now sometimes she gives us an answer which in our heads doesn’t seem relevant but actually, if you work it out and think back, there is a reason behind what she’s said” (nursery teacher at Time point 1)

They felt that it had given Ella an opportunity to experience activities that she enjoyed more frequently.

“We always knew she was quite arty, but that has kind of blossomed. She’s had the chance to do that and build her own self-esteem... Maybe, had she gone straight to school, she wouldn’t have had the same opportunities to do that...” (Nursery teacher at Time point 1)

The EP noted similar benefits as the staff and shared Ella’s mother’s view of the importance of play for her. Discussing whether Ella’s needs could have been met in P1 at this stage, she said that nursery had offered a better environment for Ella:

“No I don’t think so. She needed the play, I think...Nursery staff were sort of very aware of the need to be kind, not just give her clear directions and structure and, sort of, boundaries... A kind but firm approach...but also the times when she maybe just needed a wee bit more of the comforts...” (EP at Time point 1)

From all the adults’ comments a picture seems to emerge of a ‘need to play’ indicating a continued need for a nursery environment. Contained within this are elements of an empiricist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998). Equally it can be argued that staff could have created these boundaries and made these adjustments in P1 had a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach been taken when discussing Ella’s school readiness and her transition to school. Within the current curriculum framework in Scottish schools there is an emphasis on an active approach to learning and, as noted earlier, children should be experiencing learning at the same early level in nursery and primary 1.

The mosaic data has been used to try and create a picture of how Ella saw the positive aspects of her nursery and school environments. At the nursery stage she gave 47% of the photos that she took (Table 6-5) a positive rating. She was observed to spend

time making things in the arts and crafts area, dressing up and playing in the water tray. This is similar to the information from key adults about Ella's strengths and her liking of creative activities. Ella's comments reflected the adults' views that play was something she enjoyed doing and was important to her. At the school stage Ella reported that she enjoyed 'noisy choosing', making construction kits in school and named three peers as people she liked. She gave almost all the photos she took a positive rating. This may have reflected the fact that she felt more positive about her school environment or that she understood the task better or was more inclined to take photos of things she liked on this occasion. She showed a similar positive interest in arts and crafts activities at both stages but also added in new activities that she enjoyed at school, including construction kits, the dolls house and reading scheme words.

Perceptions of the negative experiences/ issues of a retained year in nursery and P1

A summary of the negative experiences/ issues associated with Ella's retained and P1 year are given in Table 6-9. At the nursery stage, Ella's mother expressed concerns about both her age and size in relation to her peers as a result of the retained year. At school her mother said that a boy in the class teased her as being overweight. This led to Ella exercising and being anxious at home. Once her mother reported this to the school, it was quickly dealt with and stopped. Ella's mother reported the teasing had mostly arisen from the boy's own personal issues. She said Ella became a bit bored at the end of her retained nursery year, but this was mainly because she was eager to go to school once transition visits had started. At the school stage Ella experienced difficulties in acquiring literacy skills; based on her teacher's comments and scores on local authority assessments, she did so at a slower rate than would be expected for a child of her age. Her mother said that, in her view, the UK system of phonics teaching and the non-competitive nature of the school system were contributing to this problem.

Table 6-9. Perceived negative experiences/ issues created by an additional year in nursery an in P1 for Ella

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of Child's negatives from mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of issues with a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Will be six when she starts school -Taller than other children, can open gates in nursery -Recently saying she's bored of nursery but this seems linked to an eagerness to go to school. 	<i>Nursery staff</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attendance- phases of non-attendance, still arrives late each day -Has missed out on support and learning as a result -Mum reluctant to agree to some referrals -Mum maybe doesn't see/understand all the concerns nursery have -Mum feels E will now be ok without support in school, nursery staff feel she still needs this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Formal channels not followed for retention so statutory nature of additional year not explained to mum or clear goals set for additional year -Poor attendance was allowed to go on for too long, should have been challenged sooner -A lot of EP time wasted in trying to see Ella during the Autumn term -Still coming in late each day, likely to be an issue for P1 	<p>Ella said she liked nursery and didn't mention any activities or areas that she disliked, said it was tricky when she fell over in nursery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rated 24% photos ☹ (quiet room, cloakroom, alphabet poster) and 29% ☹ (playdough, playground, books), lost interest in looking at the photos of school and said 'That's enough, ok' on the last conferencing question.
Time point 2: Perceptions of issues with a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Because she was the tallest in the class was teased about being fat by a boy in the class (he had his own issues) -Ella confused by phonics teaching in school and letter names she hears on TV. UK teaching system is confusing for her -Mum feels not enough competition in learning at school as there was when she was in school, this would help motivate Ella and her brother 	<i>School staff</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Overly sensitive in peer interactions, cries inconsolably -Doesn't show similar empathy if she hurts someone. -Had difficulty following routines and focusing in bigger groups initially. -Attendance still an issue (70%) and late at school most days, misses out on learning as a result (review meeting minutes) 		<p>Said that she didn't like doing number jigsaw puzzles, hard homework and adding on in school, said numbers & disagreements with peers were things she found difficult. She gave 1 photo a ☹ and no ☹ ratings</p> <p>The negative rating was given to a picture of a maths puzzle. She was observed to have a neutral facial expression during PE and maths, she frowned when she was told she'd need to wait to get a drink</p>

Issues with Ella's attendance continued throughout her retained year. The EP and nursery staff noted that this affected both her progress and access to supports put in place for her. The EP said the fact that the formal retention channel had not been used had contributed to this:

"...because of the way it was done. A sort of informal kind of back door way. I don't think it was maybe made clear enough to mum that it was Ella's statutory, you know, start of statutory education...They tended to back off about the attendance...It took a while before that really got dealt with to a degree where mum started to realise that she couldn't opt in and out of Ella going to nursery..." (EP at time point 1)

At the end of nursery, both nursery staff and the EP were concerned that this issue would continue into P1. The June 2010 school review minutes confirmed that this was the case with Ella's attendance at 70 % over the course of her P1 year and a concern that she arrived late in school most days. This suggests that the additional year in nursery had not removed all the identified barriers to Ella's education.

Another issue that the nursery teacher explored in her interview was Ella's mother's reluctance for referrals to be made to other agencies. This seemed to relate partly to the teacher's secondary concern, that she and Ella's mother had a different view of Ella's progress and difficulties:

"I felt that I had to persuade her to go for the Speech and Language and the [name of peripatetic teaching service] as well...I think mum was thinking that she wouldn't need anything else once she got to school...I've been trying to help her understand that I think Ella will need a bit of help once she gets to school...My biggest concern is that maybe mum couldn't see what we were seeing." (nursery teacher at time point 1)

This concern seems to be confirmed by the school data. School staff reported that Ella was having a lot of difficulty acquiring literacy skills by the end of P1. However, in her interview data her mother attributed this mainly to the teaching methods used rather than anything related to Ella's learning or earlier difficulties.

At the nursery stage Ella identified one aspect of nursery that she disliked – namely, that falling over was tricky. From the photos she took, she rated the quiet room, cloakroom and an alphabet poster negatively. At the school stage Ella identified aspects of maths and arguments with her peers as things she disliked and found difficult and rated a number puzzle negatively. This was interesting, given that her teacher reported that numeracy was a subject she was making relatively better progress in.

Perceptions of Ella's transition experiences

Table 6-10 gives information about Ella's transition experiences and the possible impact on these of her additional year in nursery. The adults working with Ella described different skills she had developed during the retained year that would help her when she moved to P1. Her mother felt that the programme of transition visits for nursery children had helped Ella become familiar with the school environment and understand the difference between nursery and school. This matches with findings from the research base that a purposeful and planned transition programme helps to support the transition process and longer-term outcomes (Burrell & Bubb, 2000, Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). The importance of routine and Ella's relationships with adults and other children was emphasised by the nursery teacher and EP as crucial factors for a successful transition. The importance of relationships in supporting transition fits with Dockett and Perry's research (2005), and in this study the adults concerned continued to emphasise this aspect in helping Ella make her next transition to P2.

Table 6-10. Perceptions of Ella's transition experiences

Data Source	Feelings before move to school	Difference additional year likely to make to this move	How the move went	What worked well during the transition	Any difficulties?	How will she manage the move to P2?
Time points 1 & 2: Parental interview data	-Ella can't wait to go	-More prepared for school -Showing an interest in books and eagerness in learning	-She was ready for P1 and the move went well-10/10 -Ella really enjoys school	-Regular, gradual visits to school whilst still at nursery -Helped Ella know difference between school and nursery before she went.	-None	-Knows she's a big girl and going to P2 -May take a while to adjust to new teacher -Continuity of support for learning teacher will help.
Time points 1 & 2: Nursery and school staff interview data	-Ella has loved school visits, listened well, can't wait to move -Doesn't choose to play in mini-classroom in nursery -Probationer teacher/ job share potential issue-risk of inconsistency in routines.	-Should settle to activities that are not her favourite without protest -Should interact more with her peers -Should respond to discussions in school more relevantly.	-Difficulty following routines, focusing in big groups and organising herself initially -Still finds change of teacher on a Thursday difficult -Settled better after Christmas, positive P1 experience overall	-Breaking instructions down into smaller steps -Making eye contact -Using Ella's name -Directly teaching her routines/ how to organise herself	-Initial difficulties but settled with support and after Christmas	-This will depend on the relationship that she develops with her next teacher.
Time point 1: EP interview data		-Can initiate conversation -Will put hand up and offer relevant answers -Has specific friendships. -Routine of homework		-Will need on-going support with relationships -Who P1 teacher is will be important		
Time points 1 & 2: Author's interpretation of Ella's perspective using mosaic data	-Ella was reluctant to look at and sort photos of school -It was therefore not really possible to compare these at the 2 time points -This may be due more to having had enough of the task than to her feelings about school		-Rates most photos she takes of school ☺ -In conferencing questions mentions many aspects of school that she enjoys		-Mentions disagreement with peers as something that she doesn't like -Class Teacher notes that she can be overly sensitive in peer interactions	

At the end of her first year in school Ella's mum said she had made a very positive transition to school. The school staff's perspective was a little different, with some initial concerns in the first term that abated after Christmas. Ella's next move to primary two was being planned at the time of data collection and the on-going importance of Ella's relationships and continuity of adults in her life were identified as important in supporting this. Ella's mosaic data suggested that generally she had a more positive perspective of her school environment (based on the number of photos she gave a ☺ rating to and her comments) than she did in nursery. This may partly stem from her engagement with the task at the two stages but equally the author felt from observation of Ella's facial expressions and interactions in the two environments that she seemed more 'at home' in the school environment.

Summary

All the adults working with Ella reported that the additional year in nursery had helped her to make progress in areas of identified need. As she moved from nursery to P1, the adults described specific skills that she had acquired which would help her learn and make progress in school. The move to P1 was reported as successful, after some initial concerns by staff during the first term. This could suggest that Ella fits into the 'taking time to adjust to school' category identified by teachers in Stephen and Cope's (2003b) study. However, Ella's P1 teacher gave a positive retrospective account of the adjustments that she made to support her and seemed to see it as part of her role to make these adjustments. This is a different finding from that of Stephen and Cope's (2003b) study.

The issue of Ella's attendance continued throughout her time in nursery and on into school. The EP felt the fact that the retention had been agreed in an informal way at a nursery stage meant that this concern was not fully clarified and documented. This led to the problem dragging on for too long during her retained nursery year before being formally addressed. Indeed, the evidence indicates it persisted on into school.

Ella was reported to maintain her progress in communication, social skills and following routines once she had started school, though P1 staff noted she had needed some more direct support in learning new routines once in school. As Ella moved through P1, on-going learning needs, particularly in the area of literacy, became evident. At Ella's review meeting in June 2010 it was agreed that she was a child who would continue to need support in P2 within her local mainstream school (see Table 4-1 for destinations).

Kevin-Case Study Three

Biographical data

Kevin and his 13-year-old sister lived at home with their mother and father at the time of the first interview. His mother worked in a bank and his father was a train driver. Kevin initially attended a child and family centre. In the interview data the nursery teacher stated that while Kevin was attending the child and family centre staff were concerned about his lack of eye contact and unusual behaviour. She reported that this led to an assessment process which concluded with Kevin being given an autistic spectrum diagnosis. School records show that Kevin joined the nursery attached to his local primary school during his pre-school year. His progress was monitored through review meetings in school. Although nursery staff's assessment of Kevin's learning suggested that he was developing the skills needed for school, they reported that he was not emotionally and socially ready to move to school. When interviewed, his nursery teacher said that at this stage he was playing alongside rather than directly with other children, became upset if they rejected him and was not very independent in nursery. This perception that there were a particular set of skills that Kevin needed to develop before he was 'ready' to start school would be in keeping with an empiricist perspective of school readiness (Meisels, 1998). It was therefore proposed by nursery staff that Kevin have a retained year in nursery. His parents expressed some initial concerns about this idea as they were worried about Kevin being older and taller than his peers. However, after attending a multi-agency meeting and listening to everyone's views, they also came to support a request for a retained year

at nursery. In the decision making process the case EP reported trying to present to all those involved an alternative perspective of supported provision in P1, but the majority view was that Kevin would benefit from a retained year. These observations highlight a tension in the different models of school readiness favoured by the adults working with Kevin. On the one hand, school staff and parental comments suggest that they have taken an empiricist perspective of school readiness (Meisels, 1998) whereas the EP's comments suggest that she was taking a more interactionist view (Meisels, 1998). When the two were explored in a meeting, the EP's comments suggest that she felt there was reluctance from the others to consider her alternative interactionist approach (Meisels, 1998). At the end of Kevin's additional year in nursery he joined a P1 class in the school that his nursery class was attached to.

Perceptions of the progress made during the retained year in nursery and during P1

Table 6-11 and Table 6-12 offer a summary of the progress Kevin was perceived to make during his retained year in nursery and at the end of his first year in school. Interview data from Kevin's parents showed they felt the level of support he was given reduced over the course of his additional year in nursery. They felt that this was partly due to the positive progress he was making:

"...He did have a learning assistant but he doesn't use her all the time. He did I think. This year he's managed to cope better." (mother at time point 1)

However, they expressed a concern that there might be a more resource-led reason for some of this. Young children in the authority who receive an autistic diagnosis are supported by a specialist peripatetic service. This is a multi-agency team of teacher, nursery nurse, speech and language therapist (SALT), occupational therapist (OT) and social worker. The service works with parents at home and with nursery staff to

Table 6-11. Support and progress during Kevin's retained year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 1: Interview data from parents	-Learning assistant. -Specialist ASC peripatetic teaching support (frequency reduced over the year) -Full time nursery place -Parent unsure if there is an ASP or IEP	-Understands more -More confident	-More sociable, has made friends -Eye contact improved -Probably not aware that he's had an additional year -Has had a good year but looking forward to school
Time point 1: Interview data from nursery staff	-Still needs a lot of explanation -Help with speech & language -Joint work with Specialist peripatetic teaching service -Shared learning assistant support -Small groups for social skills -Allocate different places in line -Preparation for transition to P1	-More confident -Improved self esteem, knows that he's a clever boy	-More in control of his own emotions -Directs the play, though some frustration if others don't follow -Understands rules/ wants to convey them to others -Very comfortable in nursery, 'big bear' helps other children
Time point 1: Interview data from EP	-Audit Support -Spectrum (working with 5 others in class) -SALT & OT -Time out when 'nipping' self	-Language improving -More independent -Asking for help -Colour recognition, counting to 10, interested in books, learning some initial sounds	Observed in nursery: -Knew environment well, making choices -Good eye contact -Able to talk to and engage EP as new adult -Followed general instructions -Happy & smiling
Time point 1: Documentary sources	-Nursery asked to send on IEP, not sent -6.09 review notes hand over of VTSS support, SALT and OT community based	-June 2009 review (nursery); notes success in meeting IEP targets -November 2010 review (P1), agreed that EP will close case file because of progress made	
Time point 1: Author's interpretation of Kevin's perspective using mosaic data	-When observed, playing very independently not seeking adult support		-Follows instructions given by staff -Makes eye contact with, smiles and talks to peers -Remembers author from home visit, introduces her to peer -Helps peer to get a drink -Names 2 children he likes in conferencing questions, rates photos with other children in them ☺

help them meet the needs of children with an autistic diagnosis. They have a pre-school brief and hand over to other agencies or close the case depending on need once the child starts school. Kevin's parents reflected on how support from this service changed during Kevin's retained year:

Mother: "They used to see him like weekly, then fortnightly, and just because they've got so many cases now and because he was doing better they cut down to once a month... They couldn't devote the time on him because there was new ones coming in, you know, that were how he was all the years ago."

Dad: "Government cuts"

Mother: "Government cuts, aye." (parents at time point 1)

The author knows from her own discussions with this team that this change in pattern of services is unlikely to be simply due to cuts to services in the current economic climate. The high level of delayed school entry in the authority has also put pressure on their resources. An opportunity to have more access to this team's support is often presented by other services as a reason for delaying school entry, particularly when a child receives a late diagnosis of autism. However, this in turn means that the service available has had to be spread more thinly. In meeting these needs the team have had to make difficult decisions in allocation of their service, as is reflected in this case study. This could be taken as evidence of a 'theft of opportunity' as described by Graue et al. (2002).

All those working with Kevin identified that he had made progress in his social skills. His parents reported that his eye contact had improved, he was more sociable and now had friends. His nursery teacher noted that Kevin moved from playing in parallel with his peers to directing the play with them. She felt that he was also more aware of nursery rules and wanted to convey these to others; '*a self appointed policeman*'. In separate observations by two different EPs (case EP and the author) Kevin was seen to follow adult directions appropriately, make good eye contact and to be able to

engage with them as new adults. Differences were reported in Kevin's understanding of language, independence, self esteem, confidence, and early learning skills such as; colour and letter recognition. Review minutes in November 2010 (the first term of Kevin's P1 year) showed it was agreed that his case file with psychological services would be closed due to the progress he had made in school.

Kevin named several children that he liked in nursery and rated photos he took of other children positively. He was observed to make eye contact with, talk to and help other children in the nursery.

Table 6-12 describes the supports that were put in place for Kevin at the school stage. In nursery and school Kevin had been allocated additional learning assistant support from an authority budget held for children with exceptional needs. Kevin's parents were uncertain as to how this support was being delivered to Kevin once he was in school. This finding is in keeping with the reports from parents in Russell's (2005) study who were not clear who was working with their child in school or how they were being supported. In her interview data the class teacher said it was used to help him follow instructions, stay on task and complete work. The school had also developed an ASP for Kevin. His parents were not aware of the ASP, but from their own and school's comments they were actively supporting his learning at home. Advice from the speech and language therapy service was also sent to school and a teacher from the specialist peripatetic teacher service had worked individually with Kevin on a programme to help him understand emotions and feelings. The school also ran a therapy inclusion group that included Kevin.

All those working with Kevin said he had continued to make good progress during his P1 year. His teacher said his independence and ability to finish tasks on his own increased over the course of the year. His parents noticed that he drew and painted more and enjoyed inventing things. They were pleased and surprised at how well he had learnt to read and the speed with which he could complete maths homework sheets. Issues around his emotional sensitivity continued, but his class teacher

Table 6-12. Support and progress for Kevin during P1

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 2: Interview data from parents at	-Social stories about turn taking and it being ok to make mistakes -Learning assistant there but mum unclear how time is spent in supporting Kevin -SALT assessment and advice -At home spreading out homework, setting boundaries of Kevin, talking things through	-Drew and painted more in school -Likes inventing things -More vocabulary -Works quickly through maths homework sheets -Has picked up reading really well -Good at using computer and laptop	-Has settled really well in school would scale this at 9/10 -Seems to like school -He can still become emotional and upset if he gets something wrong, or someone goes in front of him in the line etc. -Staff describe him as a warm, caring friendly boy who will always have friends
Time point 2: Interview data from P1 staff	-Learning assistant helps K follow instructions and start and finish tasks -Additional Support Plan -Sessions with specialist peripatetic teaching service about understanding emotions	-More independent, able to start and finish a task on his own. -Can follow 3-part instruction. -Reading is very good, benefitting from home support -Finds numeracy more stressful, especially mental maths	-Very emotional boy needs an outlet for this, can explain why he's upset -Calms down more quickly now -Sociable, has a group of friends -Peers know K is older but don't make negative comments -Enjoys school, likes coming
Time point 2: Documentary sources	-10 hours audit support -SLT and TIP programmes -Social stories	-Report notes progress in speaking reading, spelling writing, maths, enquiring mind, follows rules well - Baseline CA 6;5, literacy RS 12 SS(estimate) 86 centile (estimate) 18 th Numeracy RS 4 SS 76 (estimate) centile 5 th (estimate) Progress check Literacy RS 44 SS 84 (estimate) centile 15 th (estimate) Numeracy RS 20 SS 70- (estimate), centile 2- (estimate)	-November 2009 less anxious, feels confident and safe in school -June 2010 report - popular boy, finds competitive PE harder
Time point 2: Author's interpretation of Kevin's perspective using mosaic data	-Says his teacher helps him sort things out when others hurt or upset him.	-Gives a very positive rating of school in his comments and rates 80% school photos ☺	-Says he likes everybody in school -Says he doesn't like it when people hurt him -Class out doing PE so doesn't take photos of peers

reported he was calming down more quickly after an incident and was also able to talk about why he was upset.

Quantitative data about Kevin's literacy and numeracy skills was available from the authority's baseline and progress check. This showed that Kevin's literacy skills were better developed at school entry (falling at about the lower end of the average range) than his numeracy skills (falling well below the average range). The difference was maintained at the progress check. This conflicts with his parents' perception that maths was an area of strength for him, given the speed at which he tackled maths homework. His class teacher's interview data suggested that she saw maths as an area of relative difficulty for Kevin. There is a potential tension here in how effectively information is being shared between school and home (Hannah et al. 2010), though equally it was early days in terms of Kevin's time in school.

At the end of P1 his class teacher felt that the main area of on-going need and support for Kevin was his emotional sensitivity to situations arising in school. She described supporting him as follows:

"I find also, just taking the time to explain to Kevin that, you know, it's ok, it's not something to get upset over, you know." (P1 teacher at time point 2)

Responding to one of the conference questions, Kevin also noted that receiving this support from his teacher had helped him to sort things out:

Author: "What don't you like about being here?"

Kevin: "...Sometimes I get hurt. The teacher sorts it out." (Conferencing questions, time point 2)

Perceptions of the positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-13 offers a summary of the main points that emerged from the interview data (parent, nursery teacher and educational psychologist) and the author's interpretation of the mosaic data at two time points regarding the perceived positive experiences benefits of a retained year in nursery and in P1 for Kevin.

Parents, nursery and school staff felt that the retained year had been a beneficial experience for Kevin. Talking about this, his mother explored ideas about 'coping' and 'readiness', which suggested she held an empiricist (Meisels , 1998) view of Kevin's school readiness:

"I'm glad we did it, 'cos I think if we'd put him in when he was supposed to go ehhe he wouldn't have coped...He was not too immature to have went the year before but he definitely wasn't ready. But then this year he was ready to go." (mother at time point 2)

His nursery teacher identified the benefits as increased confidence and emotional control and appeared to be naming qualities Kevin had now developed which made him 'ready for school' (empiricist model of school readiness, Meisels 1998):

"It was right that he stayed, and this extra year has made such a difference to him. He's much more confident. He has much more control of his own emotions." (nursery teacher at time point 1)

Table 6-13. Perceived positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and in P1 for Kevin

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of positives from child's mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery during the nursery year	-More confident -More sociable, has made friends -Eye contact improved	<i>Nursery staff</i> -It was right that he stayed for the extra year -Has made big steps in nursery -More confident and in control of emotions	-November 08 attended positive review meeting where progress in areas causing concern was noted -Could be argued that such progress might also have been achieved in P1.	Says he likes nursery, particularly playing with bricks, rates 53% photos ☺ including bricks, snack area, water tray, playground, play castle, dressing up clothes. Engrossed in play in brick area, smiles, talks to peers
Time point 2: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery during P1	-Speech & understanding improved -Not too immature the year before but definitely wasn't ready -Got up to speed with peer group during additional year -School reports show he has the expected skills for a 6 year old (at age 7)	<i>School staff</i> -Difficult for teacher to assess benefits; has only known him since last June -Other staff comment on progress, change, good settling in -Presented as a child 'ready' for primary 1 from the first day	-Interviewed in August once K was in P1, reported that staff are finding he's made a good transition, has settled well	Says school is good, everything is nice likes hot dinners, the dining hall and going out to play, rates 80% photos ☺ including arts and crafts area and activities, active learning boxes, magnetic letters, class time table, reward chart, toys, sand tray

Kevin's P1 teacher had not known him until the June before he came to school. She said it was therefore harder for her to identify what the benefits of an additional year in nursery might have been. However, she referred to comments about his progress from school staff who had known him in nursery and who regarded him as a 'ready' child at the beginning of P1 (this observation suggests that Kevin may fit the category of 'ideal' or 'ready for school/ able to adjust' categories identified by Stephen & Cope, 2003b):

"I'm not sure, because I don't know how he was before...Like he was ready for it now and he has coped really well, so I would guess that they (other staff in school and nursery) were right." (P1 teacher at time point 2)

The Educational Psychologist was more sceptical as to whether the benefits were linked to the retained year or progress that Kevin could have made in P1:

"All the adults working with Kevin regularly had said the improvement was significant. So it was hard to argue that it hadn't helped, but then again one could have argued, would we have seen the same changes in P1?" (EP at time point 2)

Later in the interview s/he talked about the impact of raised hopes and expectations on a child's progress as a result of having a retained year:

"Often, I think, when this type of retained year - and it seems to have been successful - it just kind of raises the parents' hope. They become more positive, and I think that must have a knock-on effect as well in their attitude towards the child and, you know, primary one staff." (EP at time point 1)

This observation was an interesting when set against the parental interview data at time point 2. On this occasion Kevin's mum several times referred back to how she

felt when Kevin was first diagnosed and when he was a younger child. At these times she described a sense of hopelessness and worry that there were things he would never be able to do:

“I said to them at the start ‘Oh, he’ll no work the computer and things like that’ and he buzzes around the computer, ehh. He’s on the laptop and everything.” (mother at time point 2)

She talked about a recent occasion when she had seen a parent struggling to manage their child in a supermarket and how this had reminded her of herself with Kevin at a younger age.

“I thought, that was me two years ago. I felt, really, I actually felt like crying for her, because I know that she was embarrassed and everything. She was trying to lift him out of the shop. I’ve seen myself, probably years ago as well, like, trying to carry Kevin out of a situation.” (mother at time point 2)

Now that Kevin had successfully managed the transition to school, was using a computer and starting to read, she seemed to have renewed hope and a sense of positivity about the future:

“I was, like, that’s great! Maybe, you know, one day he’ll be able to drive, because I think... Oh you know what you think for the future ehh...” (mother at time point 2)

This data matches Graue and DiPierna’s (2000) observation that some proponents of additional time in nursery see it as presenting a ‘gift of time’. It also fits with the view of senior managers in the psychological service that one of the ‘pros’ of retention is creating more time to carry out assessments/ develop a clearer picture of a child’s needs.

Kevin talked about things he liked doing in nursery and rated 53% of photos he took of things in nursery positively. He was observed to be engrossed in playing with bricks and talking to his peers. He rated more of the photos he took positively when he moved to school. As mentioned in the other cases, this may be because he enjoyed school more or because he understood the task better or felt more inclined to take pictures of things that he liked. In the conferencing questions he also expressed a positive attitude to school saying that ‘Everything,s good’ and that he liked ‘everyone.’

Perceptions of the negative experiences/ issues of a retained year in nursery and P1

A summary of issues occurring during the additional year in nursery and in P1 for Kevin are given in Table 6-14. As described earlier, nursery staff and Kevin’s parents were confident that the retained year had been positive and beneficial for him. They therefore reported that there had been no major issues with the retained year. This view was also reflected in the EP’s interview data, although she argued that the progress he had made might equally have been made had he joined P1 with his age cohort.

The nursery teacher made reference to Kevin’s height and age in relation to his peers, an issue his parents had been concerned about the year before. She felt that this had not been a problem for Kevin; there were other children as tall as him and he did not seem to be worried about being older:

“...Three of them have a birthday on the same day...The other two were 5. It didn’t bother him that he was 6 and they were 5. They had a big birthday cake and they were just counting how many [candles].” (nursery teacher at Time point 1)

Table 6-14. Perceived negative experiences/ issues created by an additional year in nursery and in P1 for Kevin

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of Child's negatives from mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of negative experiences/ issues during the retained year in nursery	-Still has his moments when he becomes upset, needs things explaining again or repeated -Generally no issues, a positive year for Kevin	-Parents were concerned about his size, but there are other taller children -Will miss induction days due to family holiday	-None that EP is aware of	Says he doesn't like school area in nursery and peer who does silly things, rates 21% photos ☹ playdough, staff desk, sand pit and tray - comments he doesn't like sand tray because it burns his eyes, teacher comments he has become more positive about sensory activities. 26% photos ☹; school area, painting easels and books
Time point 2: Perceptions of negative experiences/ issues during P1	-Can get annoyed if there's a lot of homework -Some difficulties with another boy in class who is aggressive towards him, breaks class rules and upsets Kevin -Noticeably older and taller than other children, some children have commented about this to Kevin	-Can still become very emotional and will express this by scratching or hitting himself -Will need continued support in this area -Some problems in playground initially, didn't know what to do, seems to have improved now		Says he's doesn't like it when people punch him in the stomach and he can't help girls with their work because they chat, rates 20% of photos ☹ these are all of reading groups and tables of other groups in the class. (Gives his own reading group and table a positive rating)

His parents did not identify this as an issue for Kevin at a nursery stage but when the author met with his mother at the end of P1, she mentioned it as a concern:

Mother: "As I say, just sort of like his size and age, where other kids are sort of noticing and saying, sort of, you know."

Author: "Commenting that he's not the age they'd expect him to be?"

Mother: "Yeah" (Interview with mother at Time point 2)

His class teacher did not report that it was an issue:

"They know that he's seven or he's older...but they don't really think Kevin's so much older...They talk about their age...but they don't realise...I think it doesn't seem to impact in a negative way at all." (teacher at time point 2)

These two pieces of information seem to contradict each other, making it difficult to draw a conclusion. However, the author found from her conversation with Kevin's mother that a number of things had happened in school that Kevin talked about at home but that school staff were not aware of. When the author arrived at the house to carry out the second interview, the first thing his mother had wanted to discuss was Kevin's age and size, and a recent incident when another child had commented on this and upset Kevin. Unfortunately, she had shared this before the tape recorder was switched on and the interview formally started, so the details were not captured in this dataset. It would seem, then, that at least one child had commented to Kevin about his age and he had shared this with his mother but not with school staff. However, it should also be borne in mind that his parents and school staff said Kevin could be overly sensitive about comments made to him and take things negatively that other children might have meant to be neutral. Children with autism can have difficulty making sense of social situations (Powell and Jordan, 1997)) and this could also have contributed.

At the nursery stage his mother noted that Kevin continued to have moments when he became very upset about things. Although participants argued that the retained nursery year had helped to improve his emotional self-regulation, this continued to be an issue for him. In her interview data the nursery teacher thought this might be a life long ‘support’ issue.

In addition to his size and age in relation to his peers, Kevin’s mother raised two other issues that arose during his P1 year. The first concerned one boy in the class who provoked Kevin by not keeping to the class rules and by behaving aggressively towards him. His mother said this boy was also seven and had been at nursery with him. (*At the time of the study, there was another boy in the nursery class who had been retained but whose parents did not want to be part of the study. It seems likely that it was the same child*). Although Kevin had settled well into P1 his mother was very worried that the constant provocation from this other child would cause Kevin to lose his temper and respond aggressively in school in the future. She was very pre-occupied with this situation and returned to discuss it a number of times during the interview:

“...The wee boy’s quite aggressive and he can be sort of right up in Kevin’s face. He’s got a habit - he just jumps in the queue and cuts in front of you. That really annoys Kevin...”

“...Kevin was, like, really you’d think he was going to burst a blood vessel ehh. He was angry and he was, like, clenching his fists and everything. I had to try and calm him down.”

“...At the start of primary one...he used to grab Kevin and hold his hands and go and stick his nails in. Kevin used to come home with nail marks on his hands.”

“...My worry is that there’s going to be an altercation with the two of them. I don’t know how Kevin would cope with it because, as I say, he’s violent with his sister...That’s just a sort of wee worry.” (mother at time point 2)

His mother reported that this boy's behaviour was a concern for a number of parents in the class. She had approached the school and asked that they be kept apart, as they had been sharing a table and learning assistant support. She reported that she had also told Kevin to stay away from him. She had been in conversation with the boy's mother and learned that she was waiting to see if the boy got an autistic diagnosis. Kevin's mother hoped that if this occurred they would be put into different classes in the school in the future. It seemed from the interview that she had not taken it up as a major issue on a regular basis with the school. This appeared to be partly related to the empathy she felt for the other child and the mother being in a similar situation that she recalled herself being in. The issue of some conflict with peers also arose in Kevin's response to a conferencing question:

Author: "What don't you like about being here?"

Kevin: "Don't like it when people punch me in the stomach. It happens a lot."

This fits with Margetts (2006) finding that being hurt in the playground is a concern children have when they start school. The author felt from her discussion with Kevin's teacher that she was aware of the things that were upsetting Kevin in school and talked them through with him on a regular basis. The author did feed this point back to the teacher, following on from her work with Kevin, and encouraged his mother to keep sharing issues with the school.

The final concern that Kevin's mother explored was dealing with and supporting homework. School documentary sources show that staff felt that Kevin's parents were very supportive in doing homework and that this had contributed to his progress, but Kevin's mother said that he sometimes became stressed and upset about the amount he was asked to do. She had tackled this by spreading it out over the evening, but felt it was an on-going concern as he moved through school:

“I’ve tried to explain to him, you know, it will get worse” (mother at time point 2)

Kevin rated a similar amount of photos (20% at nursery and 21% at school) negatively at both stages. At the nursery stage the things that he identified as dislikes were around particular activities, for example the sand tray because it burnt his eyes. At the school stage the things he identified as ‘dislikes’ were the reading bags and group tables of other children in the class. This surprised the author because of his conferencing comments that he liked everyone and everything. It may reflect that he identified strongly with the groups that he was part of. This would support his teacher’s comment that he felt a strong sense of ‘belonging/ being part of’ (Peters, 2010) the school. It may also be a feature of his ASD, as children with ASD tend to look at the world in a very literal sense (Powell and Jordan, 1997).

Perceptions of Kevin’s transition experiences

Table 6-15 gives information about Kevin’s transition experiences and the possible impact of his additional year in nursery on these.

At the end of his retained year Kevin’s parents felt he was excited and looking forward to going to school. His nursery teacher said that it was too far off for Kevin to know how he felt. However, she felt he was aware of the move and quoted a conversation that she had had with Kevin on the topic:

“I said: Are you looking forward to going into primary one? He said: Yes ‘because I’ll be number 6 and I’m fine as I’m number 6.” (nursery teacher at time point 1)

Table 6-15. Perceptions of Kevin's transition experiences.

Data Source	Feelings before move to school	Difference additional year likely to make to this move	How the move went	What worked well during the transition	Any difficulties?	How will he manage the move to P2?
Time points 1 & 2: Parental interview	-Very excited about going to school	Will be better prepared for P1 because he's more sociable, understand better, can count to 15, write his name & is very polite	-Settled really well into school, mum rates it 9/10	-Visits with nursery, transition book, going with familiar children	-On-going issue with other boy in class	-Should manage move to P2 ok. Deputy Head involved and supporting this. Mum worried about future transition to High School.
Time points 1 & 2: Nursery and school staff interview data	-Too far ahead for Kevin to know how he feels -Plays in school area in nursery, knows what school will be like	He's more 'ready,' emotionally and socially will cope with the challenge, counting, knows about colour, can problem solve, write name & understands rules.	-Coped well with transition -'ready' for school -Transition/ settling in 10/10	-Good transition programme between nursery class & school; nursery children use gym hall, visit classroom, meet teacher. Teacher saw them 4 or 5 times in nursery -Teacher was worried but ok now	-Few issues in playground initially, not sure how to use this area.	-Now preparing for move to P2, has met teacher, visited new classroom, will go with same group/class -excited and looking forward to it.
Time point 1: EP interview data (this interview took place at start of new session)	-Don't know	-Reported improvements in social, communication & language skills in retained year will support a successful transition	-Initial reports in August of P1 suggest it's going well	-Very thorough transition programme helped -Communication passport at home		
Time point 1 & 2: Author's interpretation of Kevin's perspective using mosaic data	-Says he doesn't like school area in nursery, rates a photo of it ☹ -P1 photos of a school 40% ☺, 27% ☹, 33% ☺	-Told teacher that now he's six he's ready for school	-Speaks positively about school in conferencing questions. -Rates 80% school photos ☺		In conferencing questions speaks about how sometimes peers hurt him and he doesn't like this.	
Documentary sources					November 2009; issue raised by family re playground	

The mosaic data suggested that Kevin may have been feeling more ambivalence about his move to school than the adults were aware of. In the conferencing questions he said that he did not like the school area of the nursery, although he rated a photo he took of it as ok. He gave 40% of the photos that P1s had taken of a school a positive rating as opposed to the 80% positive ratings he gave of photos that he took once in school.

Kevin's parents and the nursery teacher returned to the topic of 'readiness' when they discussed the difference the additional year would make in his transition to school:

"That he's more ready. He's just more ready emotionally and socially, he can cope with challenges more." (nursery teacher at time point 1)

His mother's answer to this question focused on skills that Kevin had attained which she felt he hadn't had the year before:

"...Last year he couldn't really count or write his name...but now he's counting to at least 15...he's been writing his name" (mother at time point 1)

These comments all relate to a specific set of skills that his mother perceived he would need in order to be ready for school and would indicate her taking an empiricist perspective of school readiness (Meisels 1998).

Everyone working with Kevin reported that he made a successful transition to school. Exploring factors that had contributed to this, his P1 teacher highlighted the strength of the standard transition programme used by the school (this is in keeping with other research findings e.g. Burrell & Bubb, 2000, Fabian & Dunlop, 2006):

"I think there's a very good transition programme here...The nursery come in quite a lot and they use the gym hall...They came into their new classroom

and they met me several times...I was able to come about 4 or 5 times and meet them in nursery” (P1 teacher at time point 2)

However, a communication passport had also been put in place to give him extra support. This was created by the specialist peripatetic teaching service and comprised a book of pictures and some text about school that his parents could share with him in the weeks leading up to starting school. Both his parents and the psychologist identified this as another resource that had supported his move. This kind of approach would seem to have formed part of an early years transition plan, as recommended by Russell (2005), and to be a strategy that ‘reaches back in time’ and therefore offers more effective support in the transition to school, as suggested by Pianta et al. (1999). The author is not aware of a specific evidence base for this particular initiative, but it does fit with some of the recommended activities to help prepare a pupil for transition named in the Autism Tool Box (Scottish Government, 2009).

Overall, Kevin’s move to school was successful, apart from some issues in peer relationships. His class teacher felt these were resolved in the first term, but his mother said there was an on-going difficulty with one boy. Kevin’s parents and his teacher felt confident that his move to P2 would go smoothly. His class teacher reported that a process was already underway to support this:

“I think he’ll cope really well. He’s met his new teacher. He knows which classroom he’s going to. The new teacher’s going to come down and spend time with them next week...He’s staying with the same class, so we’re talking about it a lot. He’s quite aware. He’s quite excited.” (P1 teacher at time point 2)

This suggests that the school continued to be aware of the need to support the children’s transitions on an on-going basis and that a further programme of visits and additional activities was in place.

Kevin's mother expressed a longer-term worry about moving to secondary school but acknowledged that this was a long way off:

"My only worry is when he goes to High School, because obviously at that age they can be crueller. So that's sort of, but I feel if we can get as far as this then..." (mother at time point 2)

Summary

All adults working with Kevin agreed that he had made progress in the areas of identified need during his retained year in nursery. His parents and nursery staff appeared to adopt a maturational and empiricist approach to school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998) and felt that he was more 'ready' for P1 at the end of the year than he had been the previous year. His EP, who took a more interactionist perspective (Meisels, 1998), acknowledged this progress but suggested that it might also be the case that he would have made similar progress had he joined P1 with his age cohort instead of having an additional year in nursery.

Kevin's move to P1 was seen to be smooth and successful for Kevin but when his mother was interviewed at the end of his P1 year she raised a number of issues that had arisen and were likely to persist into subsequent years of school.

Oliver - Case Study Four

Biographical data

At the time of the first interviews Oliver was 6 and his older brother was 14. They lived at home with their mother, a housewife, and their father, a taxi driver. The Deputy Head of the primary school reported that they had concerns about Oliver when he first started in the nursery class at age 3. At this time his mother was unwell and this led to Oliver's erratic and limited attendance at nursery. It was initially felt that the delayed language that he presented with related to his early home experiences and limited attendance at nursery. No other professionals were involved with Oliver or his family at this stage. School records show that he missed most of his first year in

nursery. At this stage attendance is non-statutory so there was no obligation on school staff to enforce, report or act on it.

In Oliver's second, pre-school year his attendance improved somewhat and staff began to be able to work with him and gauge the level of his difficulties. Oliver enjoyed being outside and free play activities, but when staff tried to get him to engage in more structured activities he became 'stubborn and non-compliant.' The EP reported that his language skills continued to be very delayed, with Oliver having very few words to express himself other than a vocabulary of swear words that he used when he felt frustrated. During Oliver's pre-school year the Deputy Head felt that he would benefit from an additional year in nursery, as he had missed out on so much of his first year at nursery. At this time she felt that the nursery would offer a more flexible and appropriate environment for meeting his needs and a peer group that Oliver would relate to better. She reported finding that the system for applying for a retained year in the authority was unclear. She used the authority's deferral paperwork to submit a request, but this was sent back by the authority with a note saying that Oliver was outwith the age range for deferral applications. An internal decision was therefore made that Oliver would spend a further year in the nursery class. A full time place in nursery was offered to Oliver.

During Oliver's additional year in nursery it was felt by the Deputy Head Teacher and other professionals that, although he had made good progress, his abilities were at a level where he would benefit from specialist provision. This was discussed with his parents and an application was made. At this time his parents were also planning to move to a new house in another authority. For these reasons it took time for a final conclusion to be reached and it was only once the school year had finished that an offer of a place in a special school in a neighbouring local authority was made. Oliver attended this school for a few days in the first term of P1 but his parents withdrew him from the school and requested that he return to the mainstream school to which his original nursery class was linked. Support was put in place in the mainstream school and Oliver re-joined his peer group from nursery two weeks into the first term

of P1. Concern about Oliver's rate of progress and level of learning continued throughout P1 and a further application for specialist provision was made. The parents' plan to move to a house in another authority fell through, and by the end of Oliver's P1 year he had been offered a place in a special school within the case study local authority catering for children with complex learning needs. At the time of the last interview a transition process to this new school in P2 was about to be planned.

Perceptions of the progress made during the retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-16 and Table 6-17 offer a summary of the progress Oliver was perceived to make during his retained year in nursery and at the end of his first year in school. From Deputy Head Teacher interview and the documentary sources provided by nursery staff it was clear that a structured plan was put in place for Oliver during his retained year in nursery. Long-term targets were identified for Oliver via his Individualised Education Programme (IEP) as follows:

*“Increase vocabulary of common objects
Respond to ‘what’ questions from pictorial cues
Say ‘hello’ and ‘good bye’ to helper
Play a board game with an adult and take turns appropriately
Increase knowledge of local environment.” (Documentary analysis of IEP 08-09 session)*

These IEP targets suggested that nursery staff were prioritising the areas of language and communication and social interactions for Oliver. From this and comments of adults about the reasons for considering a retention, these would seem to be Oliver's main areas of need. They also correspond with the main reasons that Head Teacher and Managers gave for retention in Hannah and Myant's (2002) study.

Staff worked with Oliver through small groups and general interactions in the nursery to develop his skills in these areas. All children in case study local authority nurseries hold a Personal Learning Plan folder where a photographic, annotated record is kept

Table 6-16. Support and progress during Oliver's retained year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 1: Interview data from parents	-Small group work in another room to help him concentrate -Speech Therapy -Woman who comes to do 1:1	-Starting to talk more clearly, puts sentences together, comes and tells you things -Other people can understand him better -Doing lots of drawings and paintings	-Can concentrate if there's not too much distraction -Knows how to sit in a group and pay attention -Has loved being at nursery, playing with other children, getting his hands into everything
Time point 1: Interview data from nursery staff	-Full time place -Visual timetable -Audit support -1:1 support 45 minutes daily -2 key worker sessions daily -VTSS support -SALT support & staff liaison.	-Working range of vocabulary -Now plays with more equipment in nursery -Attendance has been at 75%, but as he was in nursery no formal EWO involvement and reduced pressure on the family	-Relates well with younger children -Less frustrated, now waits his turn and complies with adult instructions -Seems unaware that he's had an extra year in nursery, hasn't become bored -Nursery is a happy and secure place for him
Time point 1: Interview data from EP	-IEP -Nursery teacher in key worker role -School support for learning teacher involved. -Close monitoring by depute head	-Attendance improved, though glitch in this when assessments were fed back, information came as a shock to the family -Colour and shape recognition has developed -Enjoys books and memorises part of these -Language improved, swearing has lessened significantly	-Has learnt nursery routines -More eye contact, though sometimes stares -Turn taking improved -Can play outside without close supervision -Has gained in confidence -Nursery is a happy place that he'll miss
Time point 1: Documentary sources	-IEP with clear targets, linked to areas of need identified and regularly reviewed through year	-PLP folder - more colours recognised through year, longer and more complex language being used and vocabulary improving-specific dated examples given	PLP folder - making eye contact, smiling, using appropriate greetings, learning to share equipment and take turns, more appropriately-specific dated examples given
Time point 1: Author's interpretation of Oliver's perspective using mosaic data	-Observed to stay at activity longer and focus more closely when an adult is alongside him	-Took photos of a range of activities in nursery and rated most of them ☺, supporting staff observations that he now tries a greater range of things in nursery and is enjoying it	-Engages adult in interaction/ pretend play outside -Willing to come inside and work with me as a new adult, concentrates well -Names 3 peers as people he likes

of their progress and next steps in learning are discussed and set. Nursery staff had used this to record both Oliver's progress in meeting IEP targets but also his development of other skills. Reviewing the summary sheets contained within this a clear picture of the progress that Oliver made became evident.

From this record and interview data it was apparent that the main areas of progress were in Oliver's language, social and interactional skills. His parents noticed that he spoke more clearly, using longer phrases, and other people could understand him better. When the author visited them at home for the first interview, Oliver was at home and spoke often during the interview. This was not always related to what was being discussed but it was in complete sentences, for example 'Would you like a cup of tea?' and 'My dad's a taxi driver.'

The Deputy Head reported that Oliver was more able and willing to follow instructions. She felt that he had become happier, had settled into nursery and was making better use of the range of activities on offer. This was a marked change from his previous year. The case EP noted that, although the change was noticeable, it was in relation to the lower baseline that Oliver had started at and his skills continued to be delayed compared with what would be expected for a child of his age:

"I suppose he'd gone from unruly toddler two year oldish behaviour to more settled three year old behaviour." (EP at time point 1)

Oliver learned to interact with his peers more successfully. The Deputy Head felt that being able to spend time with the much younger children in the afternoon helped here. This was reflected in one of Oliver's responses to the conferencing questions where he named three children in the nursery that he liked.

Some issues around Oliver's attendance continued during his retained year. The Deputy Head reported that this was at 75% and under the authority protocol would

usually trigger a discussion with the school's Education Welfare Officer (EWO). The Deputy Head did not feel that it was necessary to pursue this formal channel as Oliver was still in nursery, and involving the EWO would have placed Oliver's family under unnecessary further pressure. The EP noted that his attendance worsened when s/he gave the family feedback about the extent of delays in Oliver's skills shown by the formal assessment that she had carried out.

The development of Oliver's social and interactional skills was also reflected in the mosaic data. Oliver was able to name three children he liked in the conferencing questions. He was observed to engage and interact with adults in the nursery. He was also willing and able to sit and focus with the author on the conferencing questions and in taking and sorting photographs. He was faced with a new situation and an unfamiliar person, but he managed these tasks successfully and appropriately.

Oliver had a disrupted start to his P1 year, starting initially in a special school in another authority and then returning to the primary school that his nursery class was attached to. Staff were concerned that these changes would be unsettling, but he managed this successfully:

"I was surprised as to how well he coped with the transition. I think because he had the uniform and things...he felt this sort of person. Now I am a big boy and I'm at school. He just loved the idea of being in primary one." (P1 teacher at time point 2)

Oliver had previously been identified as a child with complex needs who would benefit from a special school placement. As the school knew him well already from

Table 6-17. Support and progress for Oliver during his P1 year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 2: Interview data from parents	-Gets taken out of class and given extra help -Mum tries to help at home but Oliver often doesn't want to sit & listen after a day at school -Considering extra tuition out of school	-Still a bit slow on the learning side, will happen eventually -Knows some letter sounds, can count to 50ish can do more on the computer. -Would scale year 5/10	-Has settled in & does what he's told -Just loves everything, going to school, playing with friends -Feels grown up, more like his brother
Time point 2: Interview data from P1 staff	-IEP & Visual timetable -Adult support (am & pm) -Advice and direct support from VTSS & Speech and Language Therapist	-Will stand up & talk & tell everybody things -Recognises number 1-10, not yet consistently counting -Can write name and recognise some sounds in it -Confident in using camera -Would scale year 6/10 academically	-Has learnt names of all children in class & key adults -Interacts more with adults -Can play a game independently with a small group of peers -Motivated, works hard, tries all tasks -Would scale year 8/10 socially, 7/10 overall.
Time point 2: Documentary sources	None supplied by school		
Time point 2: Author's interpretation of Oliver's perspective using mosaic data	-Watched teacher and peer closely when instructions were given	-Appropriately answered teacher's questions about searching for worms. -Followed instructions from teacher correctly	Took a lot of photos of his peers, rates them all ☺, named one male peer as his favourite person, reflected staff view that he liked school by rating almost all photos ☺

the nursery, they were able to liaise with staff in this setting and put support in place for him in P1. A visual timetable and IEP were reinstated as he joined a class of 17 children (19 by the end of the session). At key points of the day Oliver was given adult support (from the authority's budget for children with exceptional needs) to direct him and provide individual support to complete differentiated work that his class teacher produced for him. His teacher noted that he was able to join the whole class unsupported for activities such as PE, art, drama, and story time and listening and talking. The speech and language therapist and specialist peripatetic teaching service became involved in his case again and advice and support was provided. Oliver responded well to this support and maintained a positive attitude throughout his P1 year. However, his teacher noted on-going issues:

"He managed quite well in terms of routine and what we're doing...In terms of the actual work that we were doing, he found that challenging from the word go...He would sit quite happily and listen but actually what he could do compared to the others... it was remarkably different." (P1 Teacher at time point 2)

Interview data shows that Oliver developed new skills during his P1 year, albeit at a slower pace than his peers. Authority baseline data was not available for Oliver because he had started his education in a neighbouring authority. His mother noted that he was beginning to count and knew some letter sounds. His class teacher reported that in academic terms he could write his name, recognise some letters and the numbers 1-10. She felt that socially it had been a particularly positive year for Oliver, rating it at '8' on a 10-point scale. She felt he had enjoyed being back with peers he knew from nursery, attending the primary school that his brother went to and being able to join in some class activities: sit and listen during group times and stand up and talk to his peers. However, as discussed in the previous section, she expressed concerns about the fact that increasingly his peers were developing skills at a faster rate than him and that they and he were starting to notice these differences. In

discussing this with her, the author asked whether Oliver, given his positive attitude, could have managed P2 in his current school. She responded as follows:

“I would voice my concerns if he were staying in mainstream...The gap socially and academically between the one year, it’s very wide already. I think he’ll adapt really well at this stage to his new context.” (P1 teacher at time point 2)

From the interview data it seemed that Oliver’s parents were going along with the professionals’ recommendations rather than requesting a change of school themselves. His mother made no reference to their initial change of decision from the identified special school placement back to mainstream school at the second interview. It seemed to the author an unexpected decision, given Oliver’s father’s support of the idea in the previous year:

“When Mrs B at the nursery says: “Look, it’s not best that he goes on to normal school straight away,” we looked at the bigger picture. You’ve got to do what’s right for him and just see what happens.” (Father at time point 1)

However, from the EP interview data it is clear that the offer of a place in the school occurred late in the term and it was not possible to arrange visits for Oliver. Russell (2005) identified the importance of parents being able to visit both mainstream and special school options before making a final decision. The timescales involved meant that Oliver’s parents would not have had the opportunity to form a view and finalise their decision. The class teacher reported that they had visited the new placement this time and were feeling positive about the move.

Oliver again named a peer as a favourite person and focused well on taking and rating photographs at the end of his first year in school. Observation data showed that he was able to follow through instructions given to him and answer questions from his teacher appropriately. The very positive view of school that both staff and his mother

felt he had was reflected in the positive rating he gave to almost all the photos that he had taken.

Perceptions of the positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-18 summarises the main points that emerged from the analysis of interview data (parent, nursery teacher and educational psychologist) and the author's interpretation of the mosaic data at two time points regarding the perceived benefits of a retained year for Oliver.

Oliver's parents felt that the additional year helped him progress and prepare for school. Interviewed at the end of Oliver's first year in school, they felt that the full-time place he had gained was the main benefit:

Dad "We see a huge difference in him now"

Mum "It's prepared him a lot more for school...you know, that he'll have to sit and pay attention' learning like any other child." (parents at time point 1)

It is interesting that parents placed so much importance on the difference that having a full-time place had for Oliver. The EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2003) found that other features of the nursery environment are more important and that having a full-time place did not impact on the child's educational outcomes in the longer term. If Oliver had joined P1 with his peers he would have had a full time place in P1 as well. In the author's view what a full-time nursery place offers is an opportunity for parents to have more time in the day to themselves or to seek employment. This was a feature that also emerged for Charlie's mum in the case study discussed earlier.

Table 6-18. Perceived positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and in P1 for Oliver

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of positives from child's mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	-It brought him on really well -Prepared him for school a lot more, can now sit, listen, pay attention and learn	<i>Nursery staff</i> -Gave greater clarity to his needs -Behaviour would have escalated had he gone into P1 with age cohort -Gave parents time to come to terms with and understand Oliver's needs	-Gave time to clarify needs, identify issues and strengths -Helped in developing a more engaged relationship between parents, nursery staff and other professionals	Oliver had difficulty answering the conferencing questions but reported liking power rangers and batman, rated 61% of photos ☺; including outdoor area, gluing, snack table, water tray, rocking horse, climbing frame, some photos fitted with adult reports of things he enjoyed, observed working with adult indoors, playing outside on bikes, climbing frame and sand tray.
Time point 2: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	-The full day helped him get ready for school because school is a full day too	<i>School staff</i> -Definitely benefitted from structure, routine, learning difference between nursery and school -Gave opportunities to develop interactional skills and dialogues – is now a sociable boy		Reported liking football, packed lunch, everything. Rates 89% of photos ☺; cloakroom, computer suite, writing area/dragon story project, bean plant, lunch bags, children playing, lining and dressing up. This fits with adult reports that Oliver likes most things in school. Observed during small group activity to find worms in garden.

The Deputy Head teacher and EP focused on different aspects:

“It gave greater clarity regarding what Oliver’s needs are. Initially his delays were attributed to non-attendance due to mother’s illness. However, with a period of more intensive support in place, learning and communication needs continue to be evident” (Author’s notes from interview with Deputy Head Teacher)

“It also gave us some opportunity to assess him. We had no possibility of doing anything apart from observe chaos at the end of his first year in nursery... We could say a lot of: He can’t do this and he can’t do that, but it was very hard to see what he could do.” (EP at time point 1)

The Deputy Head Teacher felt that it had created ‘time’ for a fuller assessment of Oliver’s needs and had helped his parents to come to terms with his needs. Arguments that delaying school entry offered a ‘gift of time’ (Graue & Di Perna, 2000) and the maturationist perspective on school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998) are again evident here. However, the author felt from her interview with Oliver’s parents that they may not fully appreciate the extent and nature of these needs as perceived by school staff and the EP. In their interview data at the end of Oliver’s retained year they cited examples of two family members with language difficulties. One was returning to mainstream school from a language class and another had a difficult start to P1 but settled down and is now ‘*Brains of Britain*.’ They seemed to feel that this might also apply to Oliver in the future. Referring to these examples his father commented:

*“I think, seeing that happen, it’s given me an idea of what can happen.”
(father at time point 1)*

In her interview data at the end of P1 his mother spoke about Oliver's move to special school and expressed a view that the move to special school would be short-term and Oliver might 'catch up':

"It will take him, like I said, a bit longer for him. That's why he's getting taken away...they feel he's maybe starting to struggle a little bit and it was just, it might be for a few years, just to bring him on his feet..." (mother at time point 2)

The intervention of an additional year in nursery may carry a 'hope' for families that it will resolve the child's difficulties at this early stage and enable them to continue at the level of their peers in the future. A longer-term follow up of these cases may give us this information, but from the author's experience of working in this authority, only a few children return to mainstream school once placed in specialist provision.

The EP also described the retained year as giving professionals an opportunity to engage and develop a better relationship with Oliver's family. To achieve this she noted that a different approach to managing this relationship was taken by professionals:

"...more people being involved with them in a kind of gentle way, I think. We went out to them, rather than the nursery hoping they could have a chat when somebody came to pick him up." (EP at Time point 1)

This is an interesting observation of the professional/ family dynamic, but it could be argued that this different style of relationship could have been developed with Oliver's parents during his ante and pre-school year.

Oliver's on-going difficulties in communication and learning were evident when the author used the child conferencing questions with him. Oliver found it challenging to give appropriate answers to the questions at both stages. At the nursery stage he did

not answer very many of them and at the school stage he sometimes gave unrelated responses

Author: "Where is your favourite place in school?"

Oliver: "I want some milk." (conferencing questions, Time point 2)

or contradictory answers (e.g. said he liked football in answer to one question and then named it as something he did not like about being in school). However, he enjoyed the process of taking and rating photographs of both environments. In a similar way to the other case study children, he rated more photographs positively at a school stage (89%) than at a nursery stage (61%). At the nursery stage the photos that he rated positively triangulated with the places he spent time playing in and the staff reports of things he liked doing, e.g. playing in the outside area on the bikes and climbing frame. At the school stage adults said that he liked 'everything' about school, and this was confirmed by Oliver himself in the conferencing questions and by rating almost all the photos he took as positive or ok.

Perceptions of the negative experiences/ issues during a retained year in nursery and P1

A summary of issues occurring during Oliver's retained year in nursery are given in Table 6-19.

Although everyone felt that the retained year had been beneficial for Oliver, a number of issues were identified and explored at both time points. Many of these overlapped and were shared by different people in the study. Oliver's parents felt that he would have benefitted from being given a full-time nursery place sooner:

"He could have done with the extra help earlier, with the full day at nursery in his second year at nursery. An extra year obviously like he's had, that's helped him a great deal, but with having the full day in nursery as well."
(mother time point 1)

Table 6-19. Perceived negative experiences/ issues during an additional year in nursery and in P1 for Oliver

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of Child's negatives from mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of negative experiences/ issues with a retained year in nursery	-He could have done with a full-time nursery place earlier -Looks older and larger than his nursery peers	-Maybe delayed the inevitable, it seems unlikely that Oliver will manage in a mainstream school -Application for special provision made -Appears to have made more progress than he has because staff are very familiar with him and can 'read' him	-Physically bigger than other children, this makes him stand out -Behaviour still not as you would expect for a child of his age	Doesn't answer conferencing questions about dislikes, rates 22% photos ☹; boys with trailer and bike, picture of self, car and scooter and boy playing with playdough, puzzlingly two of these are of things staff report he likes doing.
Time point 2: Perceptions of negative experiences/ issues with a retained year in nursery	-He has the same speech and learning problems as before -Struggling a bit with learning in school so will now go to a special school with smaller classes.	-Needs a very different level and type of work than other children in P1 -Works separately with an adult for a lot of the school day, joins peers for some subjects -Children are beginning to notice the differences between what Oliver is able to do and what they can -Oliver is becoming aware that he is learning different things/ supported in a different way -Needs direction and a lot of adult support.		Says he doesn't know what he finds difficult in school, reports that he doesn't like school dinners and football, only rated 1 photo ☹ (3%) this was a photo of children's paintings of butterflies, teacher reports that Oliver is positive in school, willing to sit and work at things, doesn't ever complain.

No one else raised this as an issue but the Deputy Head observed that the full day had helped in planning a package of support for Oliver. It meant that structured support could be offered in the morning and opportunities for more free play included in the afternoon. In this nursery class older children attended the nursery in the morning and younger children in the afternoons. The Deputy Head added that this meant Oliver could play with children of a range of ages and this was supportive for him as he tended to play more successfully with younger children. It is possible that, had this been offered during Oliver's pre-school year, he might have become more settled and made more progress.

Both the EP and Oliver's father raised the issue of Oliver's size in relation to his peer group:

"...Look at him, he doesn't look 5 does he? He's colossal. I mean he's going on 6 already, he looks like probably 6 or 7." (father at time point 1)

The case EP reflected that this made Oliver very visible in relation to other nursery children:

"He's tall. He's physically bigger than the other children, and you could go in and see him, you know, straight away." (EP at time point 1)

The Deputy Head argued that this was a protective factor for Oliver from a community perspective. S/he acknowledged that he stood out in size compared with the other children but felt that this signalled he was vulnerable and in need of support and would lead to him being treated with more tolerance. An alternative perspective would be that the difference in size in relation to his peers might make him stand out throughout primary school and impact on his self-esteem. This was certainly a concern for Kevin's parents, as reported by his nursery teacher.

At the end of the retained nursery year both the Deputy Head and EP reported that, although Oliver had made progress in some areas, his needs were complex and likely to require long-term support. The Deputy Head noted that the retained year may have ‘*delayed the inevitable*,’ as an application was now being made for a place in a special school. The EP also touched on this:

“I think at the end of the year we’re making a decision that we would have made a year ago.” (EP at time point 1)

This contradictory data is interesting in view of the senior psychological service managers’ report that their main criterion for a retained year would be if it prevented a child needing a specialist placement. Oliver was being put forward for a place in special school despite having had a retained year in nursery, thus professionals seemed to be perceiving that this hadn’t allowed him to ‘catch up’ or achieve skills in line with his mainstream peers. However, in tracking the case longitudinally he did go on to join a mainstream P1 class and be reported by staff and his own mosaic data to be happy in this setting. A further contradiction in the data is that, despite these reports at the end of P1, a decision was still reached that he would move on to specialist provision in P2.

The Depute Head and EP also touched on an issue that nursery staff, seeing the progress that Oliver made in social and language skills, may have over-estimated his overall progress. The EP felt that this had led to mixed messages being given to his parents:

“One of the major difficulties we had is the nursery teacher was thinking he was doing fabulously and feeding that back to the parents. She’s thinking, well he could go into primary one. Which she’s saying to the parents at one point. She doesn’t know what primary one’s like. I think that was a real problem.” (EP at time point 1)

The EP's observation here is interesting in relation to the fact that Oliver's parents decided to return to the mainstream school option for Oliver after he had attended a special school for a few days. His mother did not make any comment about this on the occasion of the second interview, but Oliver's P1 teacher observed the following, based on discussions that she'd had with Oliver's parents:

“They felt that once he went and they were dropping him off [at special school in another authority]. I think that they felt he wasn't really, they wanted him back in mainstream. He wasn't the extremes that they were seeing there. They felt that they were going to see how he went for a year in mainstream.” (P1 teacher at time point 2)

As noted earlier, the parents' interview data at the end of his retained nursery year shows a hope that Oliver would make increased progress and catch up with his mainstream peer group, as they had seen other family members do. It is possible that this positive feedback from nursery staff affected the parents' decision-making process. Equally, it could be argued that the nursery teacher's view was supported by the fact that Oliver was reported to have had a successful supported P1 year in mainstream.

At the end of P1, his parents seemed to be becoming more aware of the longer-term nature of his difficulties. This is reflected in his mother's identification of this as an issue at the end of P1:

“He still has with his speech and learning a bit. He's still got those problems, same as before.” (mother at time point 2)

In her interview data Oliver's class teacher raised a number of issues about the different learning needs, rate of progress and support that Oliver needed during his P1 year. She also added that she felt his peers were becoming aware of and starting to

comment on these differences. She described a recent incident where Oliver had been upset in the playground:

“Children are beginning to notice differences...There’s been a few instances where...he’s been coming in and saying so and so was hitting me in the playground...it turns out it hasn’t been...he was wanting to play with them but they wouldn’t play with him or he’s got set friends and they’re maybe playing with somebody else.” (P1 Teacher at time point 2)

She argued that, although he had had a positive P1 year, it was better for him to move now whilst things were still positive for him:

“It would be good for him, in my opinion, to move when things are positive rather than going to extremes...Further up the school...he’ll become much of an individual working...” (P1 Teacher at time point 2)

At the nursery stage Oliver was unable to answer conferencing questions about things that he didn’t like. He rated 22% of the photos he took as things he didn’t like. Some of these ratings were puzzling when compared with adult reports of his likes and dislikes. For example, he gave a picture of a girl gluing a positive rating but nursery staff felt this was an activity he disliked. He gave a picture of the bike and trailer a negative rating, but nursery staff felt that this was one of the things that he enjoyed playing with the most. It may be that Oliver’s learning and communication needs meant that he did not fully understand the task or that it reflected a particular mood or emotion that he was experiencing when the data collection was carried out.

Alternatively, there could be other factors in the photograph that caused him to rate it in a different way than would be predicted by adults. For example, in one photo he took other children were playing on the bike and trailer, and staff said he had found it hard to share these types of equipment in the past, so his negative rating might express frustration at seeing other children using it. This could highlight a potential problem with this method, as the child is not asked to elaborate on the detail of what

prompted them to allocate a photo in a certain way. It could be adapted further so that a child is prompted to give more detail where answers are ambiguous, but this would have been difficult for Oliver to do, given his communication difficulties at the time. It could also be the case that staff had misunderstood Oliver's likes and dislikes or that these had recently changed and this had not been noticed.

Perceptions of Oliver's transition experiences

Table 6-20 gives information about Oliver's transition experiences and the possible impact of his additional year in nursery on them. With the unexpected last minute change in decision with respect to school places there was a risk that Oliver's move to school could have been a very disrupted one, as it was not possible to enact a planned and purposeful transition programme for him that research has shown to be helpful (Smith, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Loscale-Crouch et al., 2008; Dockett et al., 2011; Kennedy et al., 2012). However, school staff and his parents felt at the end of his first year that it had been a successful experience for him. Several factors were identified that had helped with this. Oliver returned to a familiar school where he knew the children and some staff from his time spent in nursery. The relevant transition literature identifies the importance of these two factors in enacting a positive transition Margetts (2006) (importance of familiar peers) Dockett et al. (2011) (the importance of relationships, particularly for families with complex support needs). Staff liaised promptly to ensure that appropriate support was put in place for Oliver. When interviewed at the end of Oliver's retained nursery year, the Deputy Head had indicated that one of the outcomes might be Oliver coming into P1 at the school, so some advance preparation was done for this.

Oliver was getting ready to move to another school at the end of his P1 year. His parents and school staff felt that he was likely to manage this change successfully. There was again going to be the supportive feature of a 'familiar face' in the new school in terms of a boy that he knew from nursery (Margetts, 2006), and adults felt this would help him. His class teacher felt that the class sizes and curriculum would be more suitable to his needs and this also would help him to settle in.

Table 6-20. Perceptions of Oliver's transition experiences

Data Source	Feelings before move to school	Difference additional year likely to make to this move	How the move went	What worked well during the transition	Any difficulties?	How will he manage the move to P2?
Time points 1&2: Parental interview	-School placement not yet identified -Excited about going to school -Wants to have a school bag and homework	-More prepared for school -Will be able to sit and listen in school	-This went well for Oliver	-Having children he knew from nursery in his class	None	-He'll be fine in new school once he learns the new routines -There is a boy at the school who he knows from nursery
Time points 1&2: Nursery and school staff interview data	-Would find move to a different mainstream challenging -Aware school is next step, some awareness of P1 -Says 'me a big boy, school.'	-Behaviour more settled, is better prepared for a move -Parents have a better understanding of his needs	-Disrupted start but managed this better than expected -Learnt routines with support -Loved being a 'big boy' in P1	-Having familiar faces from nursery -Strong liaison between staff and agencies to make sure appropriate support was put back in place -Oliver's positive attitude	-Cases were closed due to move to special provision, re-referral took time	-Should fit in fine, everyone has a positive mind set -Additional visits will be planned -Knows boy at new school already
Time point 1: EP interview data	-Place in different school confirmed, will find move tricky at first -Move to P1 at current school would be easier but Oliver wouldn't have learnt routines or managed the work	-has gained confidence -social and communication skills have improved				
Time points 1&2: Author's interpretation of Oliver's perspective using mosaic data	P1 photos of a school 52% ☺ 24% ☹ 24% ☹ Willing to look at and rate photos, doesn't make any spontaneous comment about them		-Staff report he's settled well -Of his own photos of school rates 89% ☺ 7% ☹ and 3% ☹ -Rates books and cloakroom ☺ both stages, moves playground from ☹ to ☺ at school			

As had been the case for the other case study children, Oliver rated more photographs of school positively after he had moved to school (89% as opposed to 52%). This may partly be due to the fact that he was more in control of what he took at this stage. However, it would also support the adult view that he felt very positively about school.

Summary

At the end of Oliver's retained year in nursery there was agreement between all those working closely with him that it was beneficial for him and he had made progress. Issues emerged in relation to his size, differing views about the progress he had made and how they were fed back to parents, and his school placement in P1.

Interview data shows that everyone felt he managed this transition positively, which was surprising given the unexpected last minute changes. He made progress at his own level in P1, and adult and Oliver's own reports suggest that he enjoyed his school experience. However, on-going concerns about his progress and skills in relation to his peer group led to a further application for a place in specialist provision. At the end of his P1 year another special school place had been identified and further transition work was planned. School staff's views indicated that they saw this move as a fairly long-term one, but parental data suggest that they believed it would be for a shorter term. The author felt there was some tension in the decision behind changing the school placement, given that Oliver was reported to have had a successful year in P1 and to be happy in his current school.

George - Case Study Five

Biographical data

At the time of the first interview George was 6 and his sister was 8. They lived at home with their mother, a primary school teacher, and their father, a civil engineer. George's family had lived abroad until the summer of 2007, so he joined nursery

provision in the city later than most children. George had a diagnosis of autism. His difficulties included delayed language and social development, and some challenging behaviours.

A range of support was put in place for George in his mainstream nursery and an application was put forward for specialist provision for his P1 year. However, in the course of review meetings with educational staff his mother also raised the possibility of a retained year in nursery. In the interview data from her first interview it was evident she felt this might help him access some mainstream provision in the future:

“I felt that at that time I just wasn’t sure whether he would be able to cope with any amount of mainstream and I thought, “Well, if he’s going to have a chance of possibly coping or maybe even with a language unit, he just needs this extra year at nursery. Just to mature in his own head.” (mother, at time point 1)

George’s mother’s mention of his need to ‘mature’ and that he doesn’t yet have the skills to ‘cope’ in school suggest that she has taken a maturationist perspective on his school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998) and sees an additional year as giving him time to ‘catch up.’ After multi-agency discussions an agreement was reached that George would have an additional year in the mainstream nursery and the application for a place in specialist provision was withdrawn.

Although George was reported to have made some progress during his additional year, it was felt by all concerned that his needs would be better met in specialist provision. A second application was made for this, and George was offered a place in a special school. Initially George attended this provision for 4 days a week and spent half a day in the P1 class of the mainstream school that his nursery class had been attached. However this split placement did not work out and was ended during the first month of his P1 year. George then became a full-time pupil at the specialist provision.

Perceptions of the progress made during the retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-21 and Table 6-22 offer a summary of the progress George was perceived to make during his retained year in nursery and at the end of his first year in school. During George's additional year a significant amount of support was put in place. This included a full time learning assistant, support from speech and language therapy, peripatetic specialist teaching service for children with ASD and psychological services. He also had a slightly longer day at nursery than most children, staying until 1pm. Later in the year a buddying arrangement was put in place with older children to help the development of his social interactions.

George's mother and nursery staff noted some improvements in his skills over the course of the year. He was able to repeat phrases more quickly, joined groups of children in nursery for short periods and became more independent in separating from his mother and using the toilet. However, the underlying theme in many of his mother's statements was that she was disappointed in the amount of progress he had made:

"I probably hoped that he would have made more progress in terms of vocabulary and word usage than he has." (mother at time point 1)

"I think he's more capable of being at school now, but probably not the amount that I was hoping." (mother at time point 1)

An area of nursery life that George was reported to have particularly enjoyed was the buddying arrangement with older boys from the school. Both his mother and nursery staff felt he had benefited from this:

Table 6-21. Support and progress during George's retained year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 1: Interview data from parents	-Full time LA support -IEP, spectrum, visual timetable, work station -Speech therapy -Buddying arrangement with older pupils	-Understanding improved, follows instructions more quickly -Starting to repeat words and phrases -Maturity has increased -More independent, manages being away from mum, keeps clothes on when at toilet	-More interested in what other children are doing -Trying to copy other children, kicking ball, sharing space and resources -Confidence has grown
Time point 1: Interview data from nursery staff	-Extended session to 1pm -Lunch cover with nursery nurse/other staff -Spectrum (reduced to once a fortnight), SALT, IEP	-Says 'good morning' at group time sooner -Repeats some language -Once commented and made a gesture associated with puff the magic dragon song and book earlier in the day	-Joins in at group time for short periods -Now gentle towards other children -More indication that he is interested in other children -Learning to be more independent from mum
Time point 1: Interview data from EP	-Full time LA support -Needs skills to be introduced and taught, support planned in advance	-Some progress evident from 2 'PEP-r' assessments -Speech improving with prompting	-Joining in outings -More social skills
Time point 1: Documentary sources	-IEP -Review minutes	-Quicker at saying 'hello & goodbye'	-Interested in other children, likes to interact with them
Time point 1: Author's interpretation of George's perspective using mosaic data		-Says 'no' at water tray when adult tries to move him on to another activity -Very absorbed in the sensory experience of the water	-Staff report that he enjoys time with older P6 buddies

“He enjoys the boys coming to do these games with him. He even asks for them sometimes ‘Muk, Muk’ which is Mark, one of the boys who’s his favourite” (mother, at time point 1)

“Hopefully the social thing...He’s benefited from what we’ve done with the older children...” (nursery teacher at time point 1)

Table 6-22 describes a range of different supports that were put in place both at home and in George’s school setting. In school new strategies were effected to manage behaviour and support the development of communication skills. George’s mother felt positive about both her liaison with school and the support that she was receiving from a voluntary agency for managing his behaviour.

From interview and documentary analysis it was evident that George made progress in his communication skills:

“He’s got more vocabulary that he’s willing to use now, so he might make a comment on something more now than he would have done initially. Before he was very, very quiet.” (P1 teacher at time point 2)

“His labelling of pictures is increasing, so that means he’s understanding them more.” (mother at time point 2)

He also began to acquire some early literacy and numeracy skills. George’s school report described many new skills in the area of number. Although his behaviour continued to be difficult to manage at times, staff working with him said they had a variety of strategies that were effective in supporting him.

Table 6-22. Support and progress for George during his P1 year

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 2: Interview data from parents at	-Speech and Language and Occupational therapy -Tailor Ed (voluntary organisation) at home; programme of imitation work with food. -Ignoring inappropriate behaviour, using time out, encouraging G to request things using pictures and prompts	-Use of pictures developing -Labelling and understanding more pictures -Some pencil control skills	-More eye contact -Behaviour patterns vary, can still have unsettled periods of tantrums and biting.
Time point 2: Interview data from P1 staff in specialist provision	-Needs 1:1 adult support and close supervision to maintain his own and other's safety -Bear hug vest, time-out chair and timer -Pecs and chat board -Expect him to comply some of the time but also allow him to explore	-Has more vocabulary and spoken words, willing to use this to comment on things -Will name pictures -Can sustain interest in a task for longer -Learning to count using 1:1 correspondence -Has favourite books, prefers numeracy to literacy work	-Knows what's expected of him but has a mischievous side -Can seek / like negative attention -Comes happily to school 90% of the time -However can still exhibit less settled/ aggressive behaviour, difficult to predict
Time point 2: Documentary sources	-Ensure he always returns to complete a task behaviour has taken him away from	-Recognises and traces name -Can match some topic words to pictures -Can say numbers beyond 30 and count a set of 10 objects, fill in missing number in a sequence	-Can lie still and relax for 10 minutes in a yoga session -Loves messy activities and finds this calming
Time point 2: Author's interpretation of George's perspective using mosaic data	-Needs a high level of adult support to join in with other children at group time -Less adult support needed when G is allowed to choose - selects playdough	-Counts set of animals -Sequences and sticks Velcro numbers -Selects objects from smart board with prompting	-Sits and joins in with all activities at group and work time, needs adult support to move from one activity to another

In her second interview George's mother frequently returned to the theme that she regretted her choice of an additional year in nursery and felt that the specialist provision he was now in offered him the right support:

"When your child is in mainstream nursery, you still kind of cling onto the hope that they'll be ok for normal school...I think if they're very far behind their peer group, which George was, I think you should really just go and grab it. Just do it... A school like (name of school) has got a very good angle on how they could help, you know." (mother at time point 2)

"... At [name of new school] if he has a tantrum or something, it's kind of part of the day, you know, and they don't...so I've never been called 'Please come and get your son, you know.'" (mother at time point 2)

Perceptions of the positive experiences/ benefits of a retained year in nursery and P1

Table 6-23 offers a summary of the main points that emerged from the interview data (parent, nursery teacher and educational psychologist) and the author's interpretation of the mosaic data at two time points regarding the positive experiences during and perceived benefits of a retained year for George. At the end of George's additional year his mother said it had been beneficial for him. He had increased his skills in a range of areas and could cope with a longer period away from her:

"It's not been as successful as I probably would have hoped, but it's certainly enough of a difference to make me feel comfortable." (mother, at time point 1)

Nursery staff also described benefits for George, including having the opportunity to interact with a range of children and going on trips:

Table 6-23. Perceived positive experiences benefits of a retained year in nursery and in P1 for George.

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of positives from George's mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	-More ready for school -Will cope with a full day -Nice to have familiarity of the nursery environment during his additional year	<i>Nursery staff</i> -Some small steps in progress -Has had the security of familiar adults and environment -Benefited from structured play with older children and going on trips	-More 'socialised' and 'ready' for P1, reassuring for mum -Gave mum time to see progress or lack of it -More effective process of assessment and clearer picture of G's needs -Full day in nursery, more time than children have in P1	-Observed playing in water tray for an extended period -Adults report that he likes music, number, books and home corner -Nursery teachers says he has a sweet tooth and loves muffins
Time point 2: Perceptions of positive aspects of a retained year in nursery	-No positives identified as mum now feels additional year was a big mistake and wishes G had moved to special school sooner	<i>Specialist provision P1 staff</i> -Don't see any benefits and think mum would share this view -However, hard to fully assess this as didn't know him at a nursery stage		-Chooses play-dough and cutters in a free-choice period -Adults report he likes sensory activities, e.g. painting and going outside (even on rainy days)

“There’s benefits...benefit of being with a big, huge mix of children. As well as the links to school and he has made progress over the past year.” (nursery teacher at time point 1)

At the end of George’s first year in school his mother had changed her perspective:

“I think I made a big mistake with keeping him. I think I should have actually moved him to (name of school) earlier...He’s made more progress this year...I feel he’s been better supported.” (mother, at time point 2)

His P1 teacher at the specialist provision also shared this view:

“I don’t see any (benefits)...I think mum might probably be in agreement with that.” (P1 teacher at time point 2)

It was evident that this view was probably based on discussions that she’d had with George’s mother. As the interview continued, she referred to these as evidence for her statement and later commented:

“It’s hard for me to say, because I don’t know what he was like before, so I don’t have a comparison.” (teacher at time point 2)

The EP described the main benefit as more time both to carry out a thorough assessment and to allow George’s mum to come to terms with his need for a more specialist placement:

“He’s benefitted from it...It made the application to [name of group which considers applications for specialist placements] much easier. It seemed very logical; there’s lots of information and comparisons to be made. Mum’s very

much for it, whereas I think she still needed to see the progress or lack of it.”
(EP at time point 1)

George’s complex additional support needs presented a barrier to him taking part in some aspects of the mosaic approach. His language skills were not yet developed enough to allow him to answer the conferencing questions. The adults working with him felt that he would not be able to use the camera or make sense of the pictures that he took in a meaningful way. However, observation data and discussion with key adults highlighted interests in sensory activities in nursery and a new interest in outdoor play in P1.

Perceptions of the negative experiences/ issues of a retained year in nursery and P1

A summary of negative experiences/issues that occurred during George’s retained year in nursery and in P1 are given in Table 6-24. At the nursery stage, George’s mother identified issues around how changes in adults working with him and the learning environment caused him to have phases in nursery when he was upset or more difficult to settle. Almost full-time learning support assistance was put in place for George at the nursery, but his mother spoke about the impact of the staff’s behaviour management approaches on her own life:

“If he’s at nursery and he was playing up or if he’s getting aggressive or things, they would phone to get me to come and take him home... It’s quite stressful wondering, when are they going to call. When the phone rings, it’s ‘Oh God is that the nursery again?’” (mother at time point 2)

The nursery teacher explored issues around George’s behaviour and the impact on his relationship with his peer group. She described how he often made loud noises which made it challenging to include him at group times. She also felt that some of the children, particularly the younger ones, were wary and frightened of him as he could unexpectedly and physically lash out. She added that she felt George would have

made more progress in a specialist placement. This partly related to her view that he would get more speech therapy in this setting but also because she felt that, as a teacher, she wasn't able to put as much time towards working with George as she would have liked. This perspective links with Hannah and Myant's (2002) finding of some Head Teachers' views that, if a child's needs are better met in specialist provision, it is better they move there rather than have an additional year in nursery.

"I did always just wonder, with a smaller class and more support being available. Sometimes I've felt guilty as a teacher and trying to spread my time around all the children with additional needs." (Nursery teacher at time point 1)

Management of George's behaviour continued to present issues once he was in the special school setting. However, his mother reported in the interview data that it had been possible to support and gradually start to alter this over the course of the P1 year. His P1 teacher in the specialist provision described how a management strategy used in nursery impacted negatively in P1:

"In the beginning, when we had quite a bit of difficulty with him, he loved to flap laminated things...We were finding PECS was a difficulty because he just wanted to flap it, and apparently in nursery he'd been allowed to flap laminate because that was what calmed him...That was a huge barrier to us in terms of using laminated things to help with his communication." (P1 teacher at time point 2)

The split placement was also problematic. At the nursery stage the EP noted that George being allocated a half-day a week in a P1 class in a popular mainstream school created a wide authority issue, in that other children on the waiting list were not offered a place. George was said to find the two educational environments confusing, and his behaviour became harder to manage in both settings. At the nursery stage George had found even small changes and transitions challenging and

Table 6-24. Perceived negative experiences/ issues created by an additional year in nursery and in P1 for George

Time point	Parent interview data	Staff interview data	EP interview data	Interpretation of Child's negatives from mosaic data
Time point 1: Perceptions of issues with a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Change in learning assistant was unsettling for G -Change in location of G's work area after damage to the building seemed to make him more upset in nursery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NT wonders if G would have made better progress had he moved to special school sooner -G's behaviour could be disruptive in nursery, unsettling and upsetting for other children -G could make sudden loud noises, hard to include him in a group -NT concerned that G has not had his 'fair share' of her time as there were a lot of children in the nursery with complex needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Request for a split placement was problematic, G given out-of-catchment place, school was full, with waiting list, place will only be used for ½ a day a week, other children did not get a place in the school as a result of this decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stays in just one area of nursery, frustrated look on face and physically resists when adult encourages him to try another area -Adult comments: G doesn't like loud or unexpected noises, will only try a limited range of foods, can go through phases of being sad and upset but hard to find the trigger for this
Time point 2: Perceptions of issues with a retained year in nursery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -During nursery year parent often called to collect G from nursery, not the case in P1, reduced stress for mum -Split placement made start of year difficult, things settled once this ended -Having seen progress George has made in specialist placement mum now wishes she'd moved him sooner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Compliance, prefers to follow own agenda -Can scratch, attempt to bite adults and children, climbs on furniture and tables -Was allowed to flap laminated card in nursery to calm down, this has interfered with introducing PECs in school 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Needs a high level of adult prompting to stay in seat, join in adult led activities with peers -Mum comments G less happy on rainy days, likes to go outside -Teacher comments doesn't like being directed to tasks he doesn't want to do

it is likely that the two placements had created multiple transitions for George both in terms of educational environments and relationships. His mother spoke about some of these difficulties:

“It was rather messy, because we did do half a day at [name of mainstream school]. We tried that, but it did not work at all. He was really not happy in either school when we started off, but much more disruptive in [name of mainstream school].” (mother at time point 2)

The split placement was ended by mutual agreement in the September of George’s P1 year after he had attended Friday mornings for a period of about a month.

Perceptions of George’s transition experiences

Table 6-25 gives information about George’s transition experiences and the possible impact of his additional year in nursery on these. At the time of the first interview George’s mother felt that he would enjoy his move to school, as he enjoyed visiting new places. The nursery teacher and EP were more concerned about how he would manage, and their comments at the end of nursery stage reflect how difficult he was finding even small changes then. They predicted that moving to a new school was likely to unsettle him. It is unfortunate that nobody at this stage seemed to predict the impact that having multiple transitions to two different educational settings was likely to have on George.

Decisions about specialist provision are often only finalised about three months before the child is to move to their new school. George’s teacher spoke about the impact of this timescale on supporting his transition:

Table 6-25. Perceptions of George's transition experiences

Data Source	Feelings before move to school	Difference additional year likely to make to this move	How the move went	What worked well during the transition	Any difficulties?	How will he manage the move to P2?
Time points 1&2: Parental interview	-George will enjoy the move, now likes going to new places	-More ready for school than he was a year ago -Would like split placement with current mainstream and new special school	-Split placement caused difficult unsettled start -More settled now, though still occasional blips - probably part of how George is	-Visual book of photos about new school was helpful	-nursery and mainstream P1 class did not share information fully	-Depends on how much change there is in class composition and teacher.
Time points 1&2: Nursery and special school staff interview data	-Routine and familiarity are important to George, this is likely to make the change difficult for him	-More ready for school than he was a year ago, some social development with older boys	-Initial transition was difficult due to split placement -Late notification of new children to special school makes planning a smooth transition difficult	-Phased start to P1 for all children helped somewhat -Ending of the split placement improved things	-Split placement meant G was unsettled in both settings	-Likely to find this difficult, will entail a new teacher and new room -Planned programme of extra visits to support this
Time point 1: EP interview data at time point 1	-Difficult to know G's feelings as he's not aware of the move -Has found change in nursery environment difficult so likely to find move to a new school difficult too	-Has given more time to plan an appropriate transition				
Time points 1&2: Author's interpretation of George's perspective using mosaic data	Not possible to assess based on data collected					

“There isn’t really any time for transition so, like we didn’t find out, I suppose, until mid May who’s coming, and it’s just too busy a time of year to do lots of transition work... There was, like, one visit to nursery and one coffee morning where he came in.” (P1 teacher in specialist provision at time point 2)

This late notice prevented the activation of a purposeful and well co-ordinated transition programme that research has shown to be helpful (Smith, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Loscale-Crouch et al., 2008; Dockett et al., 2011; Kennedy et al., 2012). It is one of the barriers to an effective transition identified by Pianta et al. (1999) in their survey of kindergarten teacher’s transition practices.

To support the transition his mother was given a book about his new specialist provision that she was able to share with him over the summer holidays. She reflected that this was helpful:

“They gave us a very nice book that kind of detailed who his teacher was, where his class was going to be, and I think that helped him to know where he was.” (mother at time point 2)

She did not say whether the mainstream school produced a similar thing. The author wonders whether an assumption had been made that this environment was already familiar to him from his attendance at the nursery class, creating the feeling that he’d taken part in the universal transition programme for P1 pupils.

Over George’s first few weeks of P1 he had a staggered start to the specialist provision to help him get used to the new setting. Despite the supports that were put in place by staff, his mother reported that the transition was a difficult period for George. This seemed partly due to changes in routine and environment as predicted

by his nursery teacher and EP, but another factor was the impact of the split placement. His mother felt that there were difficulties with the sharing of information:

“I think, as well the move from the nursery to the first-year class, the information transfer wasn’t great. So I didn’t feel the people in the P1 class [in the mainstream school] had enough information about George. At one point the new learning assistant said ‘Oh, I didn’t know George could speak’ ...ohh god, ok.” (mother at time point 2)

The split placement was ended early in the autumn term and his specialist provision P1 teacher commented on the impact:

“I think once he was here all the time was when it all started to be better for him. He didn’t have the upheaval of having to go somewhere else on a Friday. I did visit him on the other placement and it was a busy, busy P1 classroom...too much for him.” (P1 teacher in specialist provision at Time point 2)

His mother added her own reflections on the split placement:

“I think big, big class, then the fact that he was at [name of special school] four days a week and then all of sudden he was somewhere different. I think it was quite a lot for him really. It was not the best idea. One tries these things, but never mind.” (mother at Time point 2)

At the time of the second interview George was preparing to make another transition into a new classroom with a new teacher. Staff and his mother both worried that this change would be difficult for him:

“I think if the teacher changes, or more if the group of children change, I think that might be an issue.” (mother at Time point 2)

“I think he’s going to find it difficult...he’s one of the three in the class who might struggle.” (P1 teacher at Time point 2)

To support this a structured and tailored transition programme of extra visits was organised (Smith, 2003; Clarke, 2007; Loscale-Crouch et al., 2008; Dockett et al., 2011; Kennedy et al., 2012;) and additional attention was paid to the importance of relationships between George, his peers and the staff (Dockett et al., 2011). His teacher described this as follows:

“We’ve been doing some extra transition time. So even this afternoon he’s going down for about 15 to 20 minutes... There’s a transition afternoon for the whole school...He does know two members of staff, because he sees them in the playground... He’s got the same children as well, so I think that’s going to help him.” (P1 teacher at Time point 2)

Summary

George had the most complex and marked additional support needs of the case study children. His mother initiated his additional year in nursery. At the end of this additional year in nursery, his mother and nursery staff reflected that there had been benefits for him and that he had made progress. However, his mother noted that this was not the amount or pace that she had hoped for. The EP reflected that the year had given additional time for his mother to come to terms with the nature and complexity of George’s needs.

George moved to a special school placement, initially on a split basis, but this proved too challenging for George and he moved on to attend the special school only early in the first term.

At the end of George's first year of school, his mother had changed her opinion about the benefits of an additional year in nursery. In hindsight, she felt that he would have benefited more from moving to his current special school sooner and she regretted her original choice. His P1 teacher shared this view, and indeed his nursery teacher had already expressed this concern in her interview data. This is in keeping with Hannah and Myant's (2002) finding that some head teachers thought that if a child would benefit from special provision it is better for them to make this move rather than having an additional year in nursery.

Moving directly from mainstream to special school provision produced more challenges and problems in managing the transition process than had the experience of the other case study children. This is in line with findings from other research studies concerning the transition of children with ASD difficulties e.g. (Jindal Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr and Smith, 2006). The time scale of application procedures within the authority also had an impact and meant there was not enough time to put a purposeful and co-ordinated transition programme in place. In addition, George initially had a split placement between the specialist provision and a P1 class in a mainstream school. This created additional transitions for him during the week and was reported to have a negative impact on his ability to settle in either setting.

George's complex needs meant that he could not engage fully with all parts of the mosaic data collection, though it was still possible to gain some insight into his views using observational data and comments from adults.

Overall Summary and Emerging Key Points from Case Study Data Against Original Research Areas

Decision making process and models of school readiness

- The case study data provided further insights into the decision making process discussed in Chapter 5.

- The five case study children were retained for a wide range of reasons and their levels of need also varied widely, both at the time the decision was taken and over the course of the study. Longitudinal data showed that two out of five of the children achieved baseline scores within the average range for a child of their age as they entered P1, whereas one child's needs were too complex to attempt this type of assessment. By the end of P1 the involvement of psychological services had ended in two of the children's cases, reflecting the progress they had achieved. This suggests to the author that very broad criteria had been applied when the decision to retain them all was taken. If their needs at the time had been set against the authority's criteria of 'a child whose needs could not be met in P1 or specialist provision,' it would seem to the author that they would not have met this criteria. Based on participants' descriptions of the child's profiles of need, it would have been possible to have either met these in a mainstream primary school or specialist provision. Instead it was argued that the nursery environment offered a better 'fit' for these needs or additional time in nursery would allow time for further development of skills in a particular area so that the child would manage better in school in the future.
- As highlighted in the initial literature review, an influencing factor on the decision making process would seem to have been the participants' models of school readiness. There was further evidence from the five case studies of parents and educational staff taking a maturationist and empiricist perspective on school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998). Case EPs' perspectives were more varied: the majority appeared to take a maturationist or empiricist perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) but one took a more interactionist approach (Meisels, 1998).
- Some participants argued that a retained year in nursery offered a 'gift of time' (Graue & DiPerna, 2000) in terms of allowing more time for the development of skills, the assessment of needs and for parents to come to terms with their child's difficulties.

- However, the longitudinal follow-up of cases also highlighted some concerns that it could be a ‘theft of opportunity’ (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). For example, it led to perceived reduced access to support from one service in two out of five cases, one child having a later start in specialist provision which appeared to offer more effective support for his needs, once he did attend and two children’s attendance difficulties being left to persist for a long period of time.

Experiences of retained year in nursery and into P1

Progress made during retained year in nursery and P1

- With respect to social and emotional development all the case study children were reported to have made progress in this area during their retained and P1 year. Changes noticed during the nursery year included increased interaction with their peers, a few specific friendships, improved concentration, turn-taking and more eye contact. During P1 changes noted included having a wider group of friends, being more positive and happy and being able to calm down more quickly.
- Comparison of the data sets showed that parents and educational staff sometimes differed in their perception of a child’s progress. For example, in one case school staff felt the child was often alone at school whereas his parents saw him as having a wide group of friends.
- At a P1 stage most parents were able to give a clearer view of the child’s progress over time, as they had been alongside them throughout. P1 teachers had usually only known the child for the course of the P1 year, often commenting that they weren’t sure how the child’s aptitude had changed since nursery. This was interesting, given that in four out of five cases the children were in P1 of the same school where they had attended nursery. There did not seem to be a formal system for checking the impact of the decision to retain on a child’s progress in P1.
- In terms of other skills, an increase in language and communication skills were reported for all of the case study children at the end of their additional

year in nursery. The changes seen varied in relation to the child's original level of skills and included increased clarity of speech, understanding and following instructions more quickly, speaking in sentences and repeating some words and phrases.

- At the end of P1 parents and education staff tended to comment more on the development of early cognitive, literacy and numeracy skills.
- All the case study children continued to have some level of additional support needs in P1, with a range of supports being put in place. However, the level of these varied widely, as noted above.
- Educational staff reported that support was guided by one of the authority's planning frameworks - either an ASP or IEP. Interviews with parents showed that in four out of five cases the parents were not aware of these frameworks and had not been involved in the planning process. One child's mother was also not clear about how learning assistant support was being deployed for her son in school and reported other concerns that she had not shared with the school. These findings again fit with Russell's (2005) research.

Positive experiences and perceived benefits during retained nursery year and in P1

- Parents and education staff referred to the positive progress they had seen the child make, though in one case the parent said there was less progress than she had originally hoped for.
- The idea that a retained year offered a 'Gift of Time' (Graue & DiPerna, 2000) was also evident in some responses which noted that it had created additional time for a more thorough assessment, developing a clearer picture of a child's needs and also time for a parent to come to terms with the needs of their child. This fits with Russell's (2005) reported finding that parents of children with more complex needs required time to come to terms with their child's disability.
- In four out of five cases educational staff said that nursery had offered a better environment for meeting the child's needs at their current developmental

stage. Educational staff reported that it had been possible to create a more flexible support package by organising supports differently in the nursery and that it offered an opportunity for more play and creative activities than might have been the case in P1.

- On balance, four out of five of the parents said at the end of P1 that they would recommend an additional year in nursery to any parent in the same situation as they had been in.

Negative experiences and perceived issues during retained nursery year and in P1

- For three out of four of the case studies parents raised the issue that their child was noticeably larger than their peers and thus ‘stood out.’ In two cases the children’s peers had made comments about them being older or larger and their parents said they had been upset by this.
- In one case staff expressed a concern about the child ‘not fitting in’ with his group of peers who were the same age but had had another year’s experience of school. This was linked to a further issue of staff having reduced expectations of what s/he would be able to achieve academically.
- In two of the cases the authority’s formal route for retention had not been followed. In both these cases the main concern at a nursery stage was around the child’s attendance, with related difficulties in their progress and a view from staff that they were finding it difficult to engage with their family. Reflecting on one of these cases, one EP reported that both the informal route that had been taken for their retention and the fact that there was a less stringent approach to monitoring attendance at nursery meant that the difficulties with attendance went on for longer than they should have done. Longitudinal follow-up showed attendance difficulties persisted for this child throughout P1.
- Two of the children in the study had an autistic diagnosis and an additional specialist peripatetic teaching service was working with them. One concern

raised by both sets of parents was that during their child's retained year the level of support this service gave their child was reduced. This could be evidence of the 'theft of opportunity' Graue and DiPierna (2000) found for American children who accessed less services and supports when they remained in pre-school settings.

- One parent stated at the end of P1 that she regretted her decision to retain her son and would not recommend it to another parent. She argued that his needs had been better met and he had made more progress in specialist provision than he had in mainstream nursery. In this case it had been the mother who had initiated the request for a retention, so it is interesting that she regretted her choice in the longer term. At the end of the retained year the nursery teacher had expressed the view that she had felt throughout that his needs would have been better met in specialist provision. This is in keeping with the findings of Hannah and Myant (2002).

Participants' perceptions of the children's transition experiences between nursery and P1 and on into P2

- At the end of the nursery year in four out of five cases the adults involved felt that the intervention of a retained year would support the child to make a more effective transition to school. In giving evidence for this they cited the progress the children had made and new skills that they had developed as helping them manage better in P1 than they would have had the previous year.
- In one case the educational staff and the EP predicted that the child would find the transition difficult. The evidence they cited for this was that he found even very subtle changes in his nursery environment challenging and was therefore likely to find a change to a new school even more difficult.
- At the end of the children's P1 year all participants reported that the children were now settled in their new school environment, and the children's mosaic data seemed to support this. However, participants' perceptions of how the

transition went varied, and this seemed to be partly related to their school destination.

- With respect to their eventual school destination, two children moved to specialist provision at the start of their P1 year (one had a split placement) and three joined the local mainstream school their nursery was attached to.
- Some P1 teachers highlighted in their interviews issues with the adaptations they had to make to support the transition to P1.
- The mosaic data gave a helpful additional insight into the children's perspective on transition. However, the extent to which they were able to engage with the data collection methods varied.

Developing a methodology to capture the children's views

- Four out of five of the case study children were able to participate in all of the data collection methods at both time points. For those who had some delays in their communication skills, the use of digital cameras and face symbols to assist in sorting their photos helped in exploring their views. The process of using cameras and evaluating the photos was participatory, and the children's facial expressions and engagement suggested that they enjoyed taking part. This suggests that it met Crichton and Barrett's (2007) criteria for an effective method of obtaining children's views.
- The various data sources often triangulated well, adding rigour to the author's interpretation of the children's views. For example, Ella's conferencing questions and rating of photos fitted with adult reports of her enjoyment of creative activities. Observation of Kevin, his nursery teacher's comments and his rating of photos showed a liking for construction activities, particularly the brick area. Even where data did not match up it did yield a new picture of the child's unique perspective instead. For example, in Charlie's case the adults reported that he was excited and apprehensive about a move to school, though his own comments and sorting of photos in nursery suggested that he was feeling mainly apprehensive. Kevin rated his photo of the sand tray negatively, but his nursery teacher reported that he now enjoyed sensory

activities more. Ella's conferencing comments about maths and her negative rating of a photo of a maths puzzle alongside her teacher's observation that this was a curriculum area that she was relatively successful in offered a unique insight into Ella's perspective of this subject in school.

- Some of the children were less enthusiastic about looking at photos that P1 children had taken of a school. Possible reasons for this are discussed later.
- For one case the child's complex additional support needs impacted on the level to which he was able to engage in some of the tasks. Further adaptation of this method therefore needs to be considered.
- At a nursery stage some of the children needed breaks from taking, looking at and sorting photos. Usually, after a period playing at an activity of their own choice, they were happy to continue with and complete the task. However, in some cases they indicated that they wanted to discontinue the task. From a research perspective this meant the data set was incomplete, which made it harder to compare data sources. However, from an ethical perspective of ensuring on-going consent the author felt it appropriate to discontinue data collection at this point; it also meets the need for 'respectful listening' as outlined by Clark and Moss (2001)
- At a P1 stage the children were more capable of sustaining their focus throughout the task. This included the child who had been less willing to engage with some of the tasks at the nursery stage.
- At a nursery stage some of the children found the conferencing questions more challenging to answer or in one case were unable to answer them. At the end of P1 the children generally gave more complete answers to the conferencing questions.
- At a nursery stage observation of the children offered a good insight into things that the children were interested in and enjoyed. The author found that the children often took photos of the places where she had observed them playing intensively for a period of time and gave these photos a positive rating. This triangulation of data sources increased the rigour of interpretations that could be made about the children's interests.

- The nursery environment was a smaller environment to walk around and capture on camera and the children took a wider range of pictures at this stage than they did in P1. In P1 the author suggested to all the case study children that they could move around the entire school building to take photos. However, in three out of four cases the children were reluctant to do this and chose to just take photos in their classrooms (where a school had a more open-plan layout the child took a wider range of photos). This meant they did not capture all the aspects of school activities that they engaged in.

Chapter 7. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings from the two data sets - participant's perceptions of the local authority's decision making process and the longitudinal case studies which tracked the experiences of the child and their family. The discussion will focus on the three broad research areas of the decision making process for retentions, the experiences of the child and their family during the retained nursery and P1 year, and developing a methodology to capture children's' views. The author will reflect on the theoretical frameworks of school readiness, initially identified from the international literature review, and how well they apply to the Scottish context of this study.

Decision Making Process For Retentions

In this authority the educational psychology service was found to play a central role in the decision making process for retentions. Case EPs were expected to take on a casework or consultation role and present evidence to support a request for a retention to their line manager, who then made a decision and informed concerned parties. The case study data suggested that this process was not clear to staff in early years settings who sometimes reached a decision informally and did not notify their EP or the authority. Both interview and documentary analysis showed a range of different information was put forward to Area Principals when applying for retention. The managers expressed concern that this information might also vary between different teams in psychological services. From interviewing case psychologists and from documentary analysis the author found that this was the case. Some of the managers in the service reported a tension in being asked to take on the dual role of both advice giver and decision maker. Documentary analysis showed that the managers had been given some guidance and criteria to apply to retention cases, but this was becoming out of date and no longer fitted with the management structure of psychological services. The criteria offered by the local authority did not take an interactionist

(Meisels, 1998) perspective and suggested that children who were retained would have extremely exceptional needs.

Service managers reported that the applications presented to them described a varied set of needs from a child being relatively young, delayed in their development in a range of areas, 'not ready' for school, hospitalised or at an early stage of an assessment process. Many of these descriptions would be in keeping with maturationist or empiricist models of school readiness being held by (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) parents and professionals. These participants held a belief that there were a specific set of skills a child needed to develop or a set period of time they should have in a pre-school setting before they were 'ready' for primary school. However, there was evidence of a more social constructivist perspective (Meisels, 1998) being held by some participants in that features of the child's environment were also considered. The Principal Psychologist noted a 'narrative of worry' in applications - with statements such as 'He'll never cope in primary1' or 'He's not ready' being linked to a belief that more time in nursery would resolve this. Semi-structured interview and documentary analysis showed that the six case study children were retained for a wide range of reasons, as had been identified by the managers, and had varying levels of need. Looking at the data, there did not appear to be evidence that, in line with the authority's criteria, the children's needs could not be met in P1 or specialist provision. Instead arguments were presented that nursery would provide a 'better fit/ environment' for the child's needs, that their current developmental stage in some areas indicated they needed 'more time' to become ready for school (maturationist model of school readiness, Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) or that a retained year in nursery could prevent the need for specialist provision in the future. This therefore suggests that the authority criteria (child's needs were too exceptional to be met in nursery, P1 or specialist provision) was not being applied to retention decisions but instead that participants' beliefs about the child's readiness for school were guiding the decision making process.

Senior psychological services managers described the perspective they took when considering retention requests. This was based on checking for a unanimous view between all parties and that parents had been actively involved in the process. Parents' own reports in the interview data reflected that they had felt fully involved in the process and confirmed senior managers perspective here. Senior managers went on to describe how they would want to know what the plan for supporting the child's needs during an additional year was. From documentary analysis of the six case studies focused on in this thesis there was no evidence of such a plan being submitted (though there were seven more cases that the author did not look at due to lack of parental consent to participate in the study) or that it formed part of the discussion around the decision making process. The Principal Psychologist added that he would like to see a process of checking with the child's future school about how this plan compared to what might be available in P1 in terms of support. These comments suggested that the senior managers were generally taking a more social constructivist (Meisels, 1998) perspective of school readiness. The Principal Psychologist's suggestion that evidence should be sought about how a child's needs might be supported in school showed elements of an interactionist (Meisels, 1998) perspective. However, in the author's view, a more complete interactionist model applied to retentions would involve nursery, parents, school staff and other involved professionals working jointly to see how the P1 environment could be adjusted and adapted to support the child's needs. In the collected data there was no evidence of this kind of process being adopted, although the Principal Psychologist did identify it as an additional step that should be built into the process.

Hence, as discussed in the earlier literature review, it does appear that holding certain models of school readiness prompts stakeholders to consider delaying school entry for children in this Scottish local authority as well as in the international context. Additionally, there was evidence that Scottish participants believed that delaying school entry might give a child a 'gift of time' (Graue & DiPerna, 2000) and longitudinal follow-up showed that sometimes it could also lead to a 'theft of opportunity' (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). Bradshaw et al. (2012) reported that 13% of

Scottish parents were choosing to delay their child's school entry. When the author, in the earlier literature review, set their reasons for making this decision alongside the models of school readiness, there was evidence that maturational and empiricist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) perspectives of school readiness were taken by this wider group of parents. The topic of school readiness seems to be developing into a wider national issue for Scotland, and Kennedy et al.'s (2012) research suggested that it is also being explored further in England. It would appear to the author that an opportunity is developing in the UK as a whole to develop a broader and shared understanding of what school readiness means and how we, in our turn, should effectively support this first universal educational transition for children using a more interactionist perspective (Meisels, 1998).

From the documentary and semi-structured interview data there did not seem to be evidence that the children's perspective on the decision to retain or transition to primary school had been sought. This is worrying when one considers the emphasis placed on it both from the human rights and legislative perspectives outlined in Chapter 3. Therefore, in addition to adopting a more interactionist perspective (Meisels, 1998), parents and professionals should also be creative in finding ways to involve children in the process and seek their views. The methodology developed to capture children's views as part of this thesis offers one possible way of achieving this.

Finally, questions about the consistency of the decision making process were highlighted by participants in the study and by analysis of the data. The senior psychological service managers questioned how consistently criteria were applied, and the moderation process that they reported using appeared to be an informal one. Documentary analysis showed that a range of different information was presented to Area Principals. There was no evidence of the outcome of the decision to retain being followed up by educational staff or EPs in the longer term. The research base suggested that negative impacts of retention tend to appear at a later stage in a child's secondary school career, with a higher incidence of emotional and behavioural

difficulties (Katz, 2000, Stipek, 2002) and an increased likelihood of leaving secondary school early (Katz, 2000, Guevermont et al., 2001, Stipek, 2002), but an awareness of or a system for checking this was not evident in this local authority.

Staff's, Parent's And Children's Experiences Of The Retained Nursery And P1 Year

There was agreement between some managers and main grade psychologists that one criterion for retention was whether it facilitated a child attending mainstream provision in P1 in the longer term. The longitudinal nature of the case studies allowed the author to follow up the school destinations of the children over P1 and P2. One of the case study children went on to attend specialist provision in P1, one moved to specialist provision in P2 and four continued to attend their local mainstream school in P2. The fact that four of the children remained in mainstream school after being retained could suggest that this criterion was met for these four cases. Equally, it is possible that the same children could have had their needs met successfully in mainstream, had they moved to P1 with their age cohort. Certainly in two cases the children's skills were falling somewhere in the average range at P1 entry, as measured by the authority's baseline assessment, and no further involvement was needed from psychological services after P1. In the interview data for one child his mother expressed a view that he had been 'academically ready' for P1 at the end of his pre-school year but needed more time to develop emotionally and socially (maturationist perspective, Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998). It could also be argued that opportunities to meet all of the children's additional support needs could have been created in P1, had a more interactionist perspective (Meisels, 1998) been taken in planning their transition to primary school rather than retaining them in nursery.

All of the case study children were reported to make progress in both their emotional and social and language and communication skills during their additional year in nursery and in P1. The children's parents appeared to have a better perspective of

progress the child had made over time than their P1 teachers. Information about the children's progress in these areas was presented as one of the positive aspects/benefits of an additional year in nursery, with participants reporting that the additional year in nursery had offered a 'gift of time' (Graue & Di Perna, 2000) to allow for this development or further assessment of needs. An additional benefit, identified in this study but not reported in the international literature, is that some education staff and case EPs argued that the additional year in nursery helped parents come to terms with their child's needs (something Russell 2005 also reported parents need). The progress the children made seemed to confirm the participants' empiricist and maturationist beliefs about school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998), judging by the comments made at the end of their retained nursery year that the child was now more 'ready' to go to school. At the end of P1 most of the parents in this study appeared to maintain this positive view of their decision to retain their child and said that they would recommend it to a parent in a similar situation to themselves.

Longitudinal follow-up showed that not all the barriers to children's development were removed by the additional year in nursery, since all the children continued to have some level of additional support needs once they joined primary school and as they moved into P2. It is possible that the progress they made occurred as a result of their on-going development rather than the specific intervention of an additional year in nursery. The case EP taking a more interactionist perspective (Meisels, 1998) argued in her interview data that the progress might equally have occurred, had the children joined P1 with their age cohort.

Educational staff at a nursery and P1 stage reported that they had used the authority's frameworks of either an IEP or ASP to plan intervention for the children's additional support needs. However, in the parents interview data they did not seem to be aware of these planning frameworks or to be involved in the implementation of them. These findings fit with Russell's (2005) study where parents of children with

disabilities reported that they did not feel fully involved with or always understand the planning and supports put in place for their child in mainstream school.

Participants adopting a 'maturationist' perspective (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels, 1998) may have contributed to this, as the model suggests that what a child needs to develop is 'more time,' and the intervention of having an additional year in nursery creates this time without the need for an additional plan. At a nursery stage parents did not seem to be concerned about this but at a P1 stage some parents were starting to query how their child was being supported.

The most frequently cited concern that arose from the case studies was of the children beginning to stand out by being larger than their peers or being asked by them why they were older. This was also one of the 'cons' of delaying school entry identified by psychological service managers. In one case it was exacerbated by the child being placed in a composite class with children the same age as him but with one more year's experience of school. Some international studies of the long-term impact of delayed school entry detected a higher incidence of social and emotional behavioural difficulties later on in school for this group (Katz, 2000, Stipek, 2002). This could be linked to a child feeling that they are out of kilter or did not fit in with their peer group in some way, and being bigger and older could be a contributory factor to this. This could be an early sign of a later difficulty for this group of children. In order to establish whether this difficulty developed for the case study children, they would need to be followed up at a later stage in school.

Other concerns centred on the impact of some of the children's patterns of non-attendance at nursery not being pursued through the more formal channels used in schools. A further issue raised by some participants was that children might have less access to services during their retained year. One of the parents at the P1 stage said she regretted her decision to retain her child and would not recommend it to another parent. She felt that her son's needs were being better met in specialist provision than they had been in mainstream nursery. This presents an interesting dilemma in relation to the criteria favoured by some psychologists that it is appropriate to retain a child if

this later prevents them needing specialist provision. It is a finding that is more in keeping with that of Hannah and Myant (2002). If a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach had been taken to discussing this child's school readiness at the decision making process stage, it might have identified that support available in the local specialist provision would be more effective in meeting his needs than an additional year in nursery.

Some P1 teachers highlighted in their interviews adaptations they had made to support the children's transition to P1. They were able to comment fully and positively about these adaptations. This is a different finding from Stephen and Cope's (2003b) study and suggested the P1 teachers in the author's study held a more flexible view to supporting transition, one that took into account mutual adaptation (Mayer, Amendum & Vernon-Feagans, 2010). This was also reflected in comments they made about supporting some of the children's next transition to P2. The fact that the children had previously identified additional support needs may have contributed to this finding, as the Additional Support for Learning Act (Scottish Executive, 2004) has made teachers more aware of the need to adapt the curriculum and environment for children with additional needs. Since the time of carrying out this study the author feels that the implementation and embedding of a Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004) has contributed further to how nursery to P1 transition is conceptualised and supported by educational staff. This curriculum began to be fully implemented in August 2010 (after data collection for this study was completed) and one of the changes it has produced is that Nursery and P1 are now both the 'early level' stage for children's learning. The author feels the implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence has led to a more gradual transition process from nursery to P1 for children. Now there is often closer liaison between nursery and P1 teachers and this is helping them to begin to develop a better understanding of each other's contexts.

One of the supportive factors identified for children's transitions was whether they joined the mainstream school to which their nursery was linked (three out of five of the case studies) or went to a different school (two out of five of the case studies). Where the children had moved on to the mainstream school linked to their nursery class, the parents and educational staff felt that the established programme of regular visits between the nursery class and school had helped the children concerned become more familiar with the school environment and staff. It would therefore seem that there were geographical and institutional factors that helped to facilitate and support the transition process for these children.

The children joining specialist provision appeared to have more disrupted and less well-planned transition experiences. This is in keeping with a finding of Jindal Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerry and Smith (2006) in the context of primary to secondary transition. This was partly related to the fact that nursery staff and parents were given short notice (May/ June 2009) of their new schools, with the consequence that there was not enough time to develop a programme of transition visits. Participants reported that this made the transition process more challenging. Additionally, in one case the child had a split placement between mainstream P1 and his specialist provision. This necessitated several transitions in a week and the adults concerned noted that this caused the child to have a more difficult start to school. These are important factors in the transition process for this vulnerable group of children and ones the local authority should take account of.

Some more specific interventions were also developed to support individual children's transition - a 'communication passport' in one case and a book about the new school in another. All these practices link with what have proved in other studies to be successful transition procedures (Brostrom , 2002, Loscale-Crouch et al, 2008, Margetts, 2007, Stephen and Cope, 2003). Additionally, they meet Pianta et al.'s. (1999) criteria of reaching back in time to support transition.

Children's views on transition were captured using an adapted mosaic methodology. The timing of the first round of data collection meant that children's views were gathered at a time when activities were in place in some nurseries to support the transition process, e.g. school area with school uniform to dress up in. In two cases the children took a photo of this area and in sorting the photos indicated either by their comments or placement of the photos that they formed a negative view of this area of the nursery. That may be because they were experiencing some anxiety or apprehension, as Dockett and Perry (2002) found some children reported during transition to school. In the P1 teacher interview data there was evidence that teachers recognised the importance of and were beginning to plan support for the children's next transition to P2. The longitudinal nature of this case study approach meant that this information about the next transition children were making was captured and a more on-going perspective on transition for this group of children identified.

Developing A Methodology To Capture The Children's Views

One of the author's research aims was to develop a methodology to capture the views of this young group of children with complex additional support needs. Following a literature review in this area, an approach using a combination of the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) and Talking Mats (Stirling University) was developed and trialled with the case study children at the two time points of this study. The results emerging from these have been explored in Chapter 5. Overall, the author felt that she had met her initial aim of developing a methodology that provided more insight into the children's own views. However, there were also some problems with this methodology, and these will be explored further in this section.

The child who was the most challenged in the areas of communication and participation in adult-directed tasks was only able to engage with some of the data collection methods. Thus, in his case, the main sources of information available were from observation and comments from key adults who knew him well. Although this data did triangulate, suggesting it was still rigorous, it generated less information than was available for the other case study children. Reflecting on this the author feels that, had time allowed, it might have been possible to adapt the approaches used to fit better with the preferred communication methods of children with more complex needs. This might include looking at their preferred communication methods in school and adapting the approach accordingly. For example, this particular child used a chat board in class to communicate about his experiences, so the author could have taken photos of the school environment and the chat board format used, alongside a familiar adult, to help him express his interests more directly. There is therefore potential to adapt this part of the methodology to obtain the views of similar children with very complex needs. For example, Paige-Smith and Rix (2011) reported working in this way when they took photos of two children with Down's syndrome interacting with their parents and made them into a book that the child enjoyed looking at afterwards. In Paige-Smith and Rix's study the children's interest in particular pictures seemed to match their enjoyment of certain parts of the activity at

the time. A similar approach of assessing children's response to photos and then seeing how this mapped with observational data could be adopted for children with more complex needs in a school setting.

At a nursery stage some of the children needed breaks from taking, looking at and sorting photos, and in one case the child indicated that she wanted to discontinue the task, the child conferencing interview with a clear statement 'That's enough now, ok' and turning away when the author began to show her the P1 photos of a school. From an ethical perspective of ensuring on-going consent the author felt it was appropriate to discontinue data collection at this point. It could be argued that the flexible nature of this approach means that the process is placed within the child's control, thereby creating for them a more comfortable and positive experience. This is important, as a researcher must be prepared to take a flexible approach and 'listen respectfully' (Clark & Moss, 2001).

On reflection, the author feels that it would have been helpful to have added some conferencing questions which focused more specifically on transition. This could have been achieved by asking generally how the child felt about their current setting and the next setting they were moving to. The face symbols used for sorting the photos could have been used here for children who were not able to offer an oral answer or needed visual support in expressing their feelings. This is a similar approach to that used by Stephen and Cope (2003) when they asked P1 children retrospectively how they felt during their early days at school. It would have offered another data source to triangulate children's perspectives and gain a fuller picture of their views of the transitions they were involved in.

A fuller picture of children's interests was achieved using observation at the nursery stage than at the P1 stage. In a future study one way of overcoming this would be to arrange to observe the children on several occasions when they were engaged in both adult-directed and free-choice activities. Within the context of this study the author attempted to compensate for this by comparing data from different data sources and

checking with educational staff how ‘typical’ they thought the behaviour of the child had been during the period of observation.

The different nature and layout of the educational settings in nursery and P1 and children’s reluctance to move around the school building when taking photos meant that they took pictures of a smaller range of things at the school stage. The reasons behind this were unclear; it may have been because the author was a less familiar person to them or it may indeed be that they were more aware of school rules and restrictions on moving around the building without permission from their teacher. The author felt that it would be putting the children under unnecessary stress to suggest that they move around the school a second time and take more photos. In a future study this might be overcome if the author was more familiar to the children or the data collection occurred on several occasions over time. Again, time constraints did not allow the data to be collected in this way on this occasion.

Nursery staff were interested in the method and remarked how well the children engaged with it. In one case the nursery teacher asked the author to make a copy of the photos a child took for his Personal Learning Folder. In retrospect the author feels it would have been helpful to have evaluated the methodology more formally but at the time her aim had been simply to develop an approach. Since carrying out this study the author has shared her approach with colleagues in the service, some of whom have applied it to get the views of P7 children at transition in a local special school. She has also shared it at two psychological conferences.

Summary

The findings from this piece of research fit the international evidence base of models of school readiness that stakeholders apply when considering delaying school entry. At the end of P1 most parents were still happy with their decision to retain. It is not possible to use the research base to identify the longer-term impact of retention on these children, since factors such as a higher incidence of social and emotional

difficulties and leaving secondary school early (Katz 2000, Stipek 2002) occur at a much later stage in education.

The case study methodology was useful both in revealing how participants' perceptions altered over time and in showing the complex and sometimes differing sets of views that stakeholders held. This longitudinal qualitative case study approach showed the richness and complexity of the picture. Triangulation through the use of different sources and methods helped to strengthen its rigour.

A way of gauging the views of children with complex additional support needs was also developed as a result of this study. It provided insights into the children's views but would benefit from further development and evaluation.

In the next chapter the overall conclusions of the research are summed up, the generalizability of the study is examined, recommendations for future research proposed and the implications of the study for policy and practice considered.

Chapter 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter a summative conclusion of the research and its generalizability is explored. Limitations of the research and what the author has learned from carrying it out are discussed. The implications of this study and recommendations for future research are also considered.

Main Summative Claims

Exploring in detail the decision making process for retention and longitudinally following up five children who were retained revealed that participants' decisions to delay school entry were influenced by the different models of school readiness that they held and applied when taking the decision. There was evidence that parents and educational staff held maturationist and empiricist models (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Meisels, 1998) of school readiness when deciding to retain a child and referred to a belief that retention offered a 'Gift of time' (Graue & DiPierna, 2000). This finding linked to research in other international contexts and showed that similar perspectives are held and applied by those choosing to delay school entry in Scotland. The authority's stated criteria for retention did not take an interactionist perspective and outlined very exceptional circumstances in which a child would be retained in nursery. The service managers reported applying a more social constructivist (Meisels, 1998) approach when considering retention, as opposed to using the authority's criteria. There was some evidence of a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach being taken by some participants in the study, but this was not widely applied. One participant reported that, where she had tried to encourage others to apply this type of model, she found that they resisted examining the issue in this way.

Following the journey of the five case study children from nursery to school showed that they made progress in their social and emotional development and language and communication skills, with parents and educational staff identifying this as a benefit

associated with having delayed their school entry. This outcome seemed to confirm the maturational and empiricist (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, Meisels 1998) beliefs of school readiness already held by participants. However, one participant argued that this progress might also have been achieved, had the children joined P1 with their peer group. A number of issues associated with retention arose: the child's size in relation to their peers; the informal environment of nursery meaning that attendance issues were not fully addressed; the level of service the children were able to access possibly reducing as a result of their spending additional time in nursery. On balance, four out of the five parents were still happy with their decision to retain their child at the end of P1, but one parent regretted her choice and retrospectively wished she had chosen for her son to move to specialist provision at the end of his pre-school year.

By the end of their first year in primary school all of the children were reported to have successfully managed this transition and were now getting ready to move into their second year of primary school. However, some difficulties in the earlier days of moving to primary school were identified. The children moving from a nursery class to P1 in the same school were provided with a greater number of transition activities put in place over a longer period of time. Their parents and educational staff felt that this helped support them in making the transition to primary school. These transition practices fitted well with those described in the research base as being helpful. The two children moving to more specialist provision experienced a smaller number of transition activities, over a shorter time scale, and participants reported that this contributed to their experiencing a more difficult transition to primary school. However, these two case study children had the most complex needs, and this should be taken into account when assessing this information.

Original Contribution Of The Research And What It Achieved

This research study is original in that, as far as the author is aware, it is the first study that has explored the views of parents, nursery staff, P1 teachers and educational psychologists on delaying school entry and that has longitudinally followed up the children's experiences during their additional year in nursery and first year in primary

school. The information that participants took into account during the decision making process has been compared with models of school readiness and findings from the international research base. It has shown that participants' beliefs in relation to school readiness influence the decision making process about delaying school entry in Scotland as is found in international research.

It has also focussed on the transition process and early outcomes for this particular group of children and has set this against participants' perspectives on school readiness. The longitudinal nature of the study means that participants' perspectives on transition have been captured at two different stages (nursery to P1, and P1 to P2). This shows that P1 teachers who took part in the study acknowledged the need to make adjustments in the transition process for children with complex additional support needs and were actively planning their next transition to P2.

Finally, a methodology for gathering the views of young children with additional support needs was developed and applied. The children's responses to participating in this suggest that they enjoyed engaging with the process and it proved possible to set their views alongside those of the adults, giving the children a voice within the process.

Impact Of The Study On The Author's Local Authority

The author's local authority has a high number of children who have their entry to school delayed, both those who are retained but also many who are deferred (children not yet aged 5 at the start of a school session who a parent can decide not to send to school for another year). The author's authority were aware of her research and as a result of this she was invited to be part of a working group looking at and addressing this unusually high rate of delayed school entry. This work has been carried out in parallel with the author's thesis research. It has meant that she has been able to apply her findings from this research to local authority processes on an on-going basis. As a result of the working group's efforts, an authority-wide process is being developed to adjust and hopefully improve the decision making process for deferrals, as follows:

- Findings from the author's initial literature review have been presented to and discussed with educational staff, health visitors, paediatricians and parents at a series of neighbourhood events. Participants' perspectives have also been sought as part of this process and again show evidence of decisions being influenced by perceptions of school readiness.
- Written research summaries, based on the author's initial literature review, have been put together for staff and parents and are now given out with authority guidelines when parents are considering delaying their child's entry to school.
- Authority paperwork has been altered so that a parent and member of education staff are now expected to discuss the pros and cons of delaying school entry before considering an application. If they decide to go ahead with an application they are then expected to develop a plan for additional support, if funding for a further year in nursery is agreed. The aim of this is to support participants in taking a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) perspective on school readiness.
- A panel of a psychologist, early years manager and primary and nursery head teachers now considers all requests for deferrals and whether the needs described can be best met in nursery or P1, so that there is now a moderation process and increased consistency in decision making.

The author feels that this has helped ensure that increased discussion takes place between staff and parents about delaying school entry. This, in turn, should encourage them to reflect on and explore their own views around whether there is an 'optimal' school entry age and to consider taking a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach to considering school readiness. Following on from the events and changes in the authority's processes, closer and more careful reflection on the decision to delay school entry now takes place than had been the practice when the decisions were made for the case study children in 2008. In 2010-2011 the number of applications for delayed entry for children with mid August to end of December

birthdays halved, and in 2011-2012 they have reduced by a further 20%. When the author in 2007 surveyed the numbers of retentions in the authority (children, aged 5 when the school term starts, who still spend an additional year in nursery) they were at the mid teen to twenty level, going back several years. However, in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 session there have been only 4 requests. This shows that, overall, the number of children experiencing delayed school entry has decreased over time. Increased discussion of the entire issue of delaying school entry and the author sharing her research at a service and local authority level have contributed to this reduction

Thus, what began as an exploratory case study developed into research that has directly impacted on an issue for the author's authority. In this sense it could be argued that it developed into a piece of action research. This had not been the author's original intention but rather evolved from her dual roles in the process. The work of the delayed school entry working group is an on-going project, and the plan for the next session is to encourage primary schools to examine how they can become 'ready schools' and engage more fully in discussions about supporting a child's transition to school where there are particular concerns on the part of the nursery or the parents.

The management of the educational psychology service was restructured again in the 2011-2012 session, with all retention requests now being considered by one manager. This should lead to greater consistency in the decision making process. However, the tension over whether the service should exercise both an advice- giving and a decision-making role continues and in the longer term it is likely that this role will be renegotiated with the local authority.

The longitudinal nature of this case study design and the time needed to carry out and write up the research alongside a full time work commitment has meant that changes in the author's authority have occurred during the collation of this study. The author has taken an active role in this process, as outlined above. This does mean that some

of the changes the author would recommend as a result of this thesis are already starting to occur at a local level. If the same data collection process were carried out now, the author believes that a different picture of the decision making process would emerge in this LA, as reflected by the reduction in the numbers of children experiencing delayed school entry, as outlined above.

Methodological Issues And Limitations

The perspectives of senior psychological service managers, case EPs, nursery and P1 staff, parents and children were sought as part of this study. However, data suggested that other professionals were also involved in the decision making process, including peripatetic teaching services, paediatricians, SALT, OT etc., and their views were not captured. In two of the cases an issue was identified in relation to a reduction in support from a specialist peripatetic teaching service for children with autism during the children's retained nursery year. As the views of this service were not sought as part of the research process it was not possible to examine the reasons behind this reduction. The time available to carry out data collection and analysis was a restrictive factor here, but a research design that sought the perspectives of other involved professionals such as the ones identified above might have produced a broader picture.

When the study compared data sources from different participants, these sometimes did not match up or conflicted with each other. It could be argued that the mis-match in the information from these different sources challenges the rigour of the study. However, in the author's view, it shows the richness of taking a longitudinal case study approach, where the different layers/ perspectives of the stakeholders in a child's world are revealed and contrasted. These multi-layered perspectives and how they interact with each other can help towards a better understanding of participants' perspectives of school readiness.

Participants' beliefs about school readiness have been inferred by setting comments they have made in the semi-structured interview data against contemporary models of

school readiness. This has led to a high level of inference being applied by the author. To add additional perspectives to this analysis, the author also discussed the inferences she was making with her supervisors, sought their view and found they were in agreement with her analysis. However, other ways of tackling this could have been applied to increase the rigour of the process. This might include asking another person to independently rate the same data in relation to models of school readiness or using other methods, such as survey or questionnaire, to look at participants' perspectives of school readiness.

The longitudinal case study design succeeded in capturing some of the changes in participants' perceptions that occurred over time, as discussed. Had this study been carried out at only one time point, some of the richness of the data would have been missed. However, as identified in the discussion of the negative experiences/ issues of retention, there is also an argument for following up this cohort of children over a longer period of time, since the main long term issues identified in the literature review would occur at a later stage in a child's education.

Retrospectively, when analysing the data and reflecting on the interview schedules the author noticed that participants were not asked a direct question about the positive experiences or 'benefits' of an additional year. The two questions to elicit information about benefits in the first round of interviews were:

'What difference, if any, has having an additional year in nursery made for X?'

'What progress, if any, has been made in relation to the original concerns during the additional year in nursery?'

In the second round similar questions were asked in relation to P1, and parents were also asked:

'Would you recommend an additional year in nursery to another parent in your position?'

These questions yielded a lot of data about perceived benefits, and the author's experience of carrying out the interviews was that participants were keen to share the positive aspects of the additional year at the beginning of the interview. It required more prompting to get them to reflect on the problematic areas later in the interview. The author therefore felt that this probably had a minimal impact on the data collected. However, if similar research were repeated, it would be helpful to include a more specifically phrased question about the perceived benefits at the nursery and P1 stage.

The timing of the second round of data collection meant that information on the transition process was captured retrospectively. Interviews were carried out in May/June 2010 once staff and parents were reporting that the children had settled into school, and this also seemed to be the case from the children's perspective based on the adapted mosaic data. A richer picture of the children's transition experiences might have been achieved if another round of interviews had been carried out during the children's first term in school. Unfortunately, it was not possible for the author to balance time for data collection against the pressures of her work commitments and carve out a space for data collection at this point in the school year.

There was a difficulty with the method the author developed to capture children's future views of primary school. At a nursery stage the children were asked to rate a generic series of pictures of a 'typical' primary school taken by P1 children, and at a P1 stage they took photos of their own school and rated these. These two sets of responses were then compared to try and gauge a before/ after transition perspective on P1. At a nursery stage some of the children engaged well with the process of sorting school photos taken by P1 children, but others were either reluctant or unable to do it. Where the children were willing to engage with the process, they consistently gave less positive ratings to photos of a school at a nursery stage than they did of the photos they took once they were in P1. This could suggest that they felt more positively about school once they were there, and this seemed to fit with adults'

reports of their view of school. Alternatively the unfamiliarity of the school setting the nursery children looked at and the more passive nature of this process may also have contributed to them rating fewer of these pictures positively. A more effective assessment of the child's views of their future school might have been achieved by showing them photos of the actual school they would be attending or indeed allowing them to visit their future school and take photos themselves. (The author's colleagues have used this approach when supporting children in a local special school who are making the transition to secondary provision). Limiting factors here were the time available to do this and, in some cases, lack of knowledge on the part of the author and education staff of the eventual school the child would attend.

Implications For Policy And Practice

The author feels that this research highlights the following implications for policy and practice.

- Ensure that a moderated system is adopted to deal with the issue of delaying school entry. This will give a clearer picture to stakeholders about the kind of evidence that is needed and the process that should take place when considering whether to delay school entry. The following actions should be incorporated into the process:
 - Parents should be made aware of both the pros and cons of a decision to delay school entry and its possible long-term impact must be fully considered.
 - Early years settings should develop and submit a plan, in consultation with the child's parents, setting out what actions will be taken to address areas of concern if the child were to have an additional year in nursery.
 - The child's future school should be involved in the discussion about delaying school entry and encouraged to comment on how they would be able to adapt and support the child's needs. This is a link that this research found was often absent and it is important to create and strengthen it in future decision making processes.

- The child's views should be sought and taken into account both when exploring the possibility of retention and during the transition process from early years settings to school.
- Key questions that psychological service managers report that they asked themselves could be used as a starting point for guiding the decision making process as follows:
 - How will the child be prepared for school entry in the future?
 - What will be different for them during their additional year?
 - What is going to give the nursery place added value?
 - How does this compare with what is on offer in their first year at their local primary school?
- Agree what criteria should be applied in these situations. This research has highlighted that the authority postulates one criterion, while managers in the educational psychology service applied different ones. As outlined above, a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) set of criteria should be developed that take into account the need for schools to make adjustments for the children they are receiving.
- A process for moderating decision making needs to be developed to ensure that criteria based on interactionist principles are developed and consistently applied.
- Clarify and agree who the relevant people to involve in the process are and what roles they should be taking.
- Ensure that the children and families who delay school entry are followed up in the longer term to check the outcomes of this decision and set up a feedback loop. This would support the development of a decision making process that is guided by checking what achieves the best long-term outcomes for children and their families.
- Help parents and staff to become more aware of models of school readiness that they may hold and how this influences their decisions about school entry. Encourage them to consider alternative perspectives if they are adopting an empiricist or maturationist approach (Carlton & Winsler, 1999).

- Ensure that education staff and other involved professionals have a fuller understanding of models of school readiness and encourage them to adopt a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach when planning transitions for children with additional support needs.
- Improve the quality of the transition process and the number of transition activities children moving from nursery provision into specialist provision experience. Ensure that practitioners are aware of and take into account things that the research base found to be effective, including the importance of relationships, supporting children in developing friendships, working in partnership with parents and developing a 'sense of belonging' (Peters, 2010) for children in their new school setting.
- Continue to encourage closer liaison between nursery and P1 staff that has begun to take place with the implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004). This will allow both parties to understand each other's contexts better and work jointly to make transition a gradual and supportive process for the children and families concerned.
- Ensure families, nurseries and specialist provision are informed sooner what a child's primary school destination will be so that there is more time to develop an individualised transition programme for these children, as recommended by Russell (2005) and further highlighted by the families in this study. This would facilitate more effective planning of the transition process.
- Ensure that parents of children with Additional Support Needs are more fully involved in the process of drawing up and supporting plans for meeting their child's needs.

As noted at the outset of this thesis, the topics of school readiness and early transitions to school currently appear to be a focus of increased attention both internationally (Peters, 2010; Dockett et al. 2011) and in the UK (Bradshaw et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2012). Although the author's authority has a particularly high level of delayed school entry, during the course of her study colleagues from several other Scottish authorities have been in touch to discuss her research and similar

concerns in their own authority. Bradshaw et al.'s 2012 report suggests that delaying children's school entry is a relatively common approach adopted by parents and early years settings in Scotland. However the author's initial literature review shows that there has been a dearth of Scottish research to look at the longer-term impact of this intervention.

This study suggests that parents, early years settings and other professionals often hold maturationist and empiricist beliefs (Miesels, 1998) about school readiness that influence their decision making process. The Growing Up in Scotland study intends to follow up until the age of 16 the current cohorts of children for whom they have recently reported on their readiness and transition to primary school. This will offer an opportunity for longer term tracking of children's progress in Scotland. However, in the author's view, waiting until this cohort of children turns sixteen (another 7 years for the oldest children in the sample, longer for the younger ones) may be leaving it too late. There is a need for the Scottish Government to check now on the outcomes of delaying school entry with current cohorts of children in secondary school. The findings from the international research base on the long term impact of delaying school entry are concerning and there is a need to ensure that the long-term outcomes for an increasing number of Scottish children experiencing delayed school entry are positive ones.

Implications For Future Research

The international research shows that the negative effects of delaying school entry have a much longer-term impact on some children who have their school entry delayed, such as dropping out of secondary school before they have completed their formal education and experiencing a higher incidence of social and emotional behavioural difficulties (Stipek, 2002). This research followed children only to the end of P1 and, although some issues were identified that might relate to these longer-term difficulties, it is too soon to know whether this will be the case. In order to address this, a much longer term follow-up of these children would be needed or

children who had been retained identified in secondary school and followed up. Possible ways of achieving this are described in the next section.

It is not possible to say based on this data, whether the children would have made the same, better or less progress, had they entered primary school at the same time as their peers. To ascertain this a more experimental approach could have been applied, comparing 'retained' and 'non-retained' children. As discussed in the methodology section, it was felt that the needs of this population were so complex and diverse that it would have been very difficult to create the conditions for such a study. At the time this research began it seemed that very few applications for retention were turned down, but since then, as discussed earlier, closer scrutiny of the whole process of delaying school entry has been introduced. It might now be possible to follow up more systematically some children with additional support needs who have their school entry delayed and others who do not. This would be an important area for future research, and one that the service early years group that the author chairs will be considering.

The author developed a methodology to capture the views of young children with additional support needs at the time of their transition from nursery to P1 as part of this study. The children engaged well with this process but for the children with the most complex needs it was more difficult to involve them in all aspects of the process. The methodology developed would benefit from further adjustment, as explored in the previous chapter. The author plans to develop and carry out an evaluation of this method as part of her local authority work. A possible way of achieving this is described in the next section.

The methodology developed for gathering children's views in this study looked at the 'here and now' of their current educational setting. As well as adjusting it to capture the views of children with more complex needs, the author felt that it could also be developed as a way to involve children more in decision making processes affecting them. A starting point for this would be to use this kind of approach to gather

children's views more fully at transition. This would allow them to express their own feelings and views rather than using the current system of what the adults think should be done. In this study there is evidence that adults held particular views about a child's feelings at transition that were sometimes contradicted when children's own views were sought. For example, in one child's case data suggested that he was feeling apprehensive about moving to primary school but his parents and nursery staff said he was both excited and apprehensive.

One way of using and evaluating the mosaic methodology would be to develop it as a method to enable nursery children to develop a picture of themselves in nursery and at home which could then be shared with their future primary school teacher. This would help both in making the child's future teacher aware of their interests and prior learning and in supporting the building of relationships between the child, home and school. These are both important features of supporting transition identified in other research studies (Dockett et al., 2011, Peters 2010). Staff's, children's and parents' perspectives on the viability of this approach could be sought prior to and following on from the transition as a way of evaluating its impact.

To fully assess the long-term impact of a decision to delay school entry a process for following up children's progress in the longer term is needed. This could be achieved by following up this cohort of children at key points in their education, e.g. in their fourth or fifth year of primary school, as they prepare to make their transition to secondary school and then in secondary school itself. The author is considering carrying out more longitudinal research in this area, as she continues to work for the same authority. Alternatively, a survey or questionnaire method could be adopted to identify and follow up a cohort of retained children at a secondary stage (Hannah & Myant, 2002 adopted this approach to find out about the progress of a retained cohort of children in their fourth year of primary school). As part of her work in the local authority working group the author has asked about the statistics the authority collects and whether these could be used to identify longer term trends. This is another avenue of investigation that the group is considering.

Increased interest in this area also presents an opportunity to raise parents' and practitioners' awareness of some of the beliefs that they may hold about school readiness. Increased discussion and exploration of models of school readiness and how this may be influencing decisions about children starting school is needed. In parallel, there is a need to support and promote a more interactionist (Meisels, 1998) approach to planning and supporting this first transition that children make to school. A long-term policy aim should be to develop 'ready schools' that operate effective transition practices to support all children and families.

For the author, a starting point for achieving this will be to disseminate the findings of her research more widely through presentations at conferences and the publication of papers in journals. As outlined earlier, she also hopes to develop, evaluate and share the methodology for capturing the views of young children with additional support needs, particularly in relation to supporting children's transition from nursery to school. The children in this study had some valuable things to say about themselves that the adults had not necessarily been aware of. It is important to continue to find ways to help them share their unique insight and for the adults in their lives to be willing to listen, to develop methodologies and to create the space for them to do so.

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Appendices

Appendix 1-Initial Letter And Leaflet To Parents

Dear Parent/ Carer,

I am an Educational Psychologist based in XXXX's Children and Families Department. I am carrying out a study to look at the information that parents and professionals take into account when considering whether a child would benefit from an additional year in nursery and what impact this additional year has for the child concerned.

As the parent of a child who is currently having an additional year in nursery I would like to hear your views. If you take part in this study your views and experiences will influence future decision making about additional time in nursery.

I plan to:

- Review paperwork submitted as part of the application for your child's additional year in nursery.
- Talk to the professionals involved in this application process (e.g. nursery teacher).
- Meet with you to gain your views on the process and how useful it has been for your child. This would take no more than 30 minutes and would be organized at your convenience in April/ May 2009

I have attached an information sheet to give you more information about this study. Please read it carefully and do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions. If you are able to take part in this study please return the consent form in the prepaid reply envelope by **16th March 2009**.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Parent Information Sheet

Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If anything is not clear or you have further questions please contact:

Heather Gorton

Tel:

Email:

Why have I been chosen?

The first phase of this research has been to identify numbers and names of children currently having an additional year in nursery using our service database and by asking case psychologists. From this I have established that your child is currently having an additional year in nursery and this is why I have contacted you about this study.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary. If you would like to take part, please sign and return the enclosed consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time.

What will happen if I take part?

I will contact you to arrange a meeting at your convenience in April/ May 2009. I will review the original paperwork submitted about your child. This is usually minutes of a meeting in nursery, which you would have been invited to, and a covering letter from the case psychologist. This information is already held on our service files. Finally I will arrange to talk to the professionals involved in your child's application (usually nursery staff, educational psychologist etc.).

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Any information you give will be confidential, your and your child's name will never be linked with that information. The information will be held securely.

What will happen to the results of this study?

What I find out will be written up but the participants' names will not be disclosed.

Once the findings are compiled, I would be happy to share them with you.

Who is organizing and funding the research?

I am carrying out this research as part of my study for a professional doctorate in educational psychology at Dundee University. The Children and Families Department in XXXXX fund my course fees at the University of Dundee and the senior management in psychological services support my carrying out this research.

Who has reviewed this study?

My supervisors in Dundee and the senior management team in psychological services have reviewed this study. I will be bound by the University of Dundee's, School of Education, Social Work and Community Education Research Ethics.

Consent Form

REPLY SLIP-----REPLY SLIP-----REPLY SLIP-----REPLY SLIP-----

I have read and understood the information given by you,

1. I do / do not give *(delete as appropriate)* permission for you to read and analyse existing retention paperwork about my child
2. I do / do not *(delete as appropriate)* give permission for you to interview the professionals involved in my son's retention application
3. I am happy / not happy *(delete as appropriate)* for you to interview me about my son's retention

Signature_____

If you are happy to participate in my study, please give me your contact details. I will keep this information confidential.

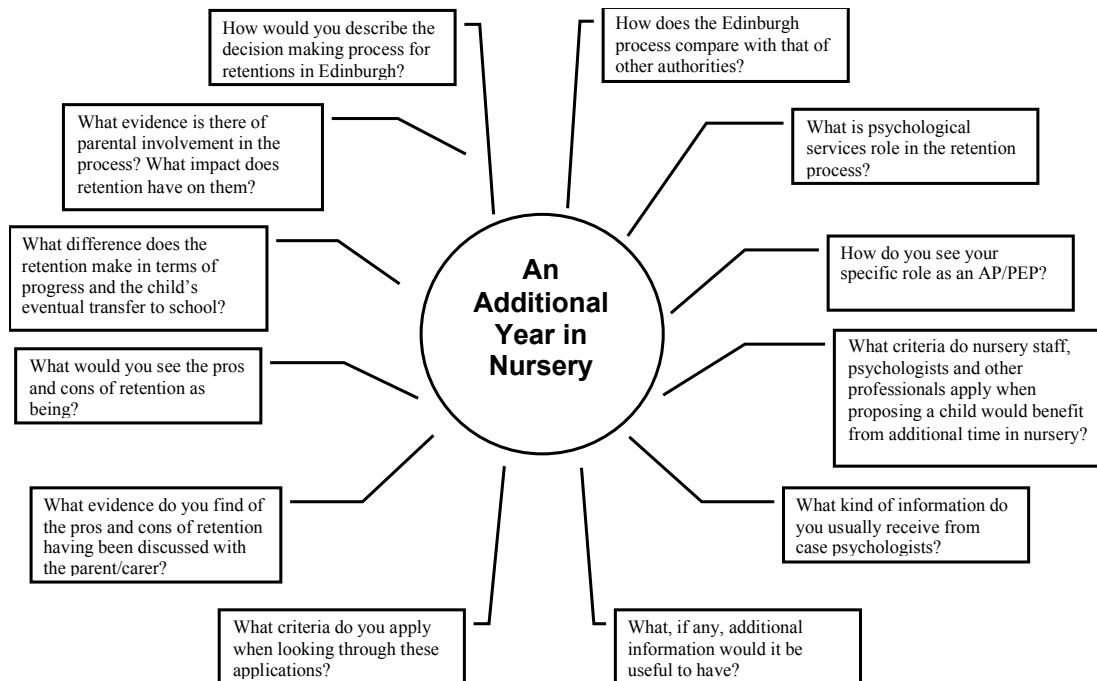
Name

Address

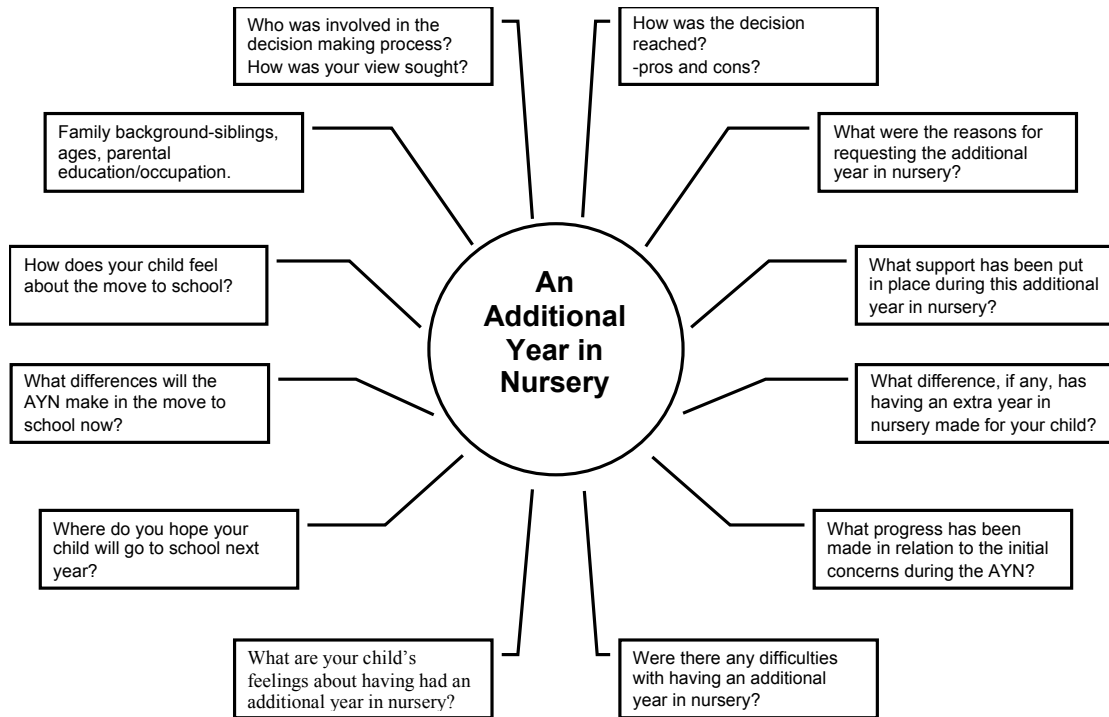
Phone number

Thank you for your help with this study!

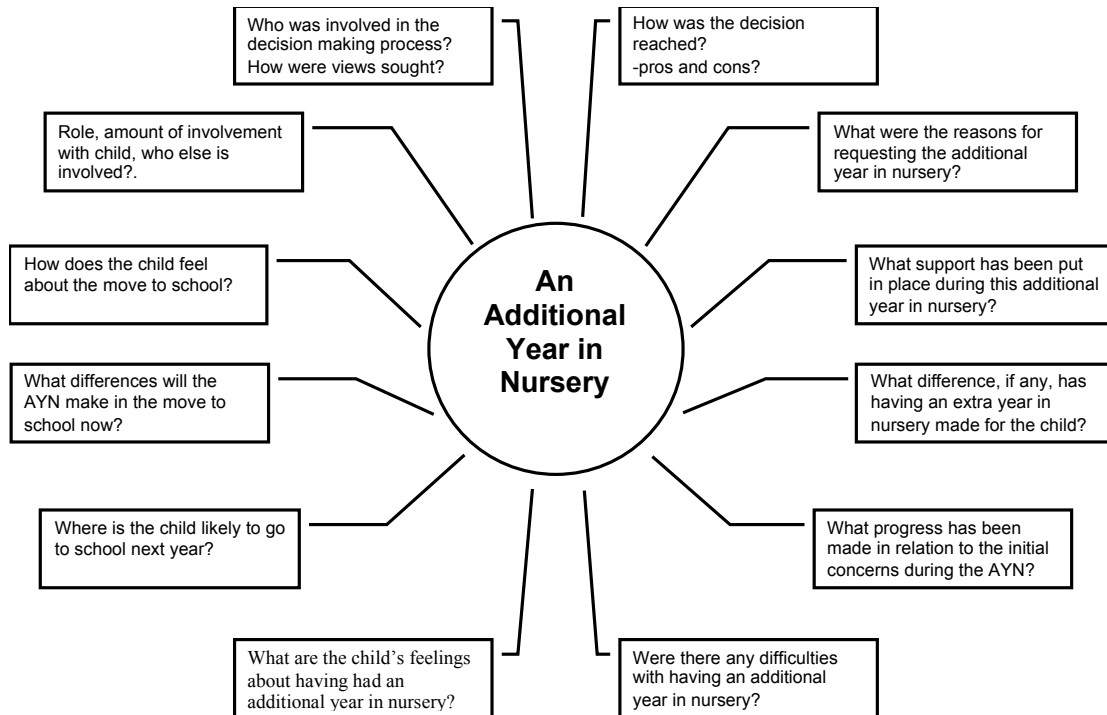
Appendix 2-Interview Schedule Used With Senior Psychological Services Managers



Appendix 3-Interview Questions Used With Parents



Appendix 3-Interview Questions Used With Nursery Staff And Parents



Appendix 4-Child Conferencing Questions Used At A Nursery Stage

Child Conferencing Questions

Why do you come to nursery?

What do you like best?

What don't you like about being here?

Who are your favourite people?

Who don't you like?

What do grown-ups do at nursery?

What should grown-ups do at nursery?

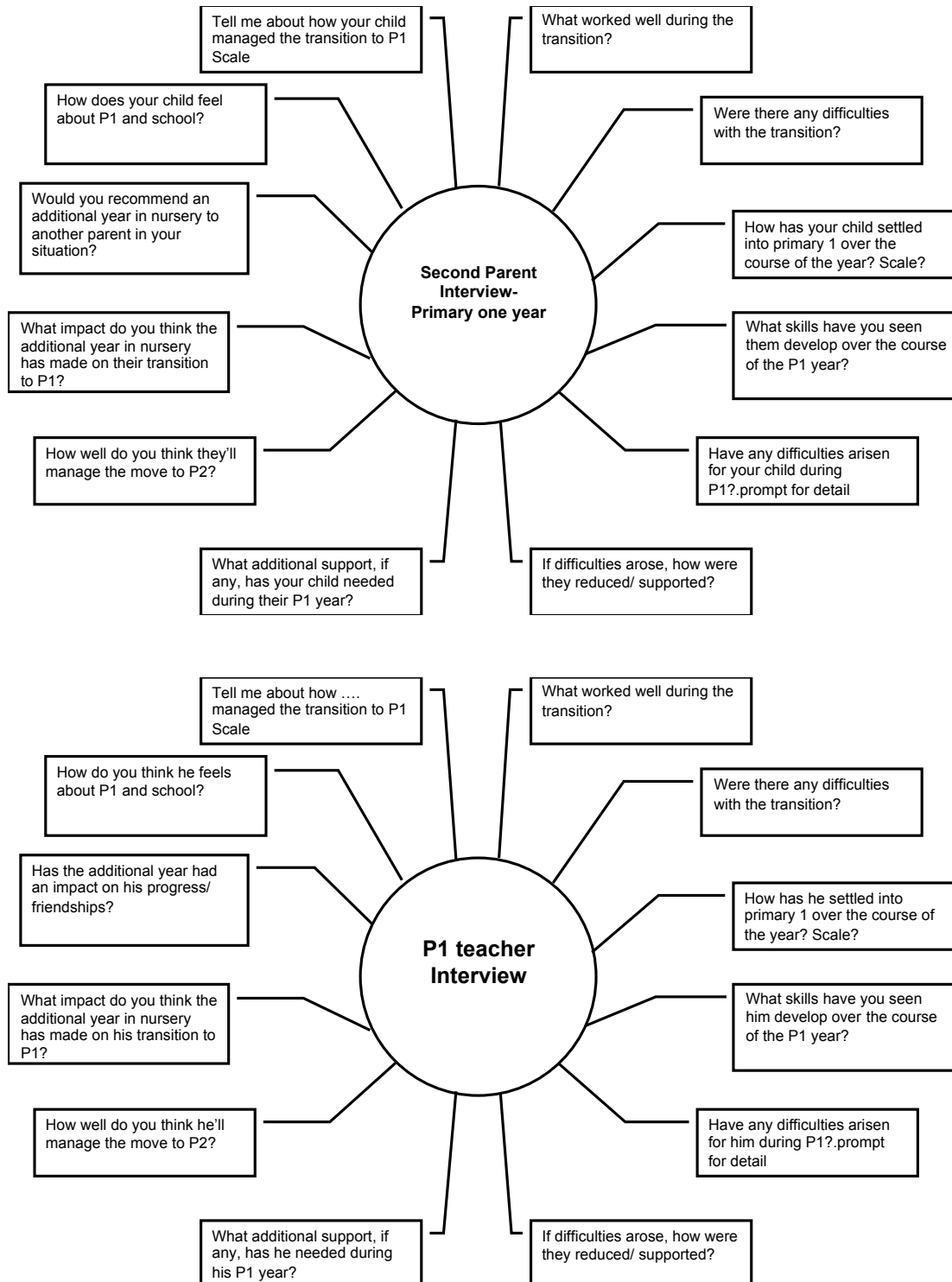
Where is your favourite place in the nursery?

Which part of the nursery don't you like?

What do you find difficult?

What has your best day at nursery been?

Appendix 5-Questionnaires Used During The Second Phase Of Data Collection



Appendix 6-Child Conferencing Questions At Second Phase Of Data Collection

Child Conferencing Questions-P1 version

Why do you come to school?

What do you like best?

What don't you like about being here?

Who are your favourite people?

Who don't you like?

What do grown-ups do at school?

What should grown-ups do at school?

Where is your favourite place in the school?

Which part of the school don't you like?

What do you find difficult?

What has your best day at school been?

Appendix 7-Second Letter To Parents Regarding Ongoing Involvement In Study

Dear parent,

Thank you again for taking part last year in the first round of data collection for my study of children having an additional year in nursery. I'm sorry that I was not back in touch in October/November as I had promised when we last met. This session has been particularly busy time for psychological services with an inspection by HMIE and a move of offices. This has meant that I have had to move my second round of data collection to the summer term.

I would like to meet with you again to talk about how your child's year in primary one has gone and what you feel the continued impact of an additional year in nursery has been for him/her. I would also like to contact the school to their primary one teacher's perspective of how the year has gone and what progress she/he has made. I have set aside some Friday mornings and Wednesdays in May and June to do this. I will be in touch shortly to check that you're happy to continue being part of this study and hopefully to arrange a date to meet.

Thank you for your continued participation and support.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Gorton
Educational Psychologist

Consent Form

Heather Gorton's study of children having an additional year in nursery

1. I give permission for you to collect paperwork and information about my child's progress during primary one

2. I am happy for you to interview my child's primary one teacher, to observe and work with my child and look at their view of primary one.

Signature_____

Date_____

Thank you for your help with this study!

Appendix 8-Example Of Data At First Stage Of Analysis

Longitudinal Case Study Summary- EP perceptions

Well I think that the feeling was that there was generally a delay but there was also kind of concerns I think about her kind of social and emotional sort of development her communication skills are very poor EP became involved at review meeting in September and emm they're called PSGs but they're sort of PSG stroke reviews and I was there all morning so Ella was one of the children being reviewed so mum and I think her uncle were invited to that review and I was introduced and in the course of that mother was asked if she would agree to me being involved and she agreed at the meeting it turned into a pre-referral meeting-so involvement from September '08 beginning of additional year in nursery

Data Source	Benefits of additional Year	Issues with Additional Year	Support	Progress: New skills in relation to ASN	Progress: Social and Emotional Development	Transition
Interview Data-nursery year	What difference, if any, has having an extra year in nursery made for the child? <u>Oh well it's certainly been I mean they did make a big diff I mean she was seen to be a lot more progress that year than the previous one</u> I mean it it was a bit of an uphill struggle with	Were there any difficulties with having an additional year in nursery? You mean from (from any perspective) well I think it was maybe I think perhaps I don't know whether this is maybe <u>because of the way it was done a sort of informal</u>	What support has been put in place during this additional year in nursery? <u>Well she had VTSS they were involved, speech and language therapy and a learning assistant</u> because there was audit time given and I think that	What progress has been made in relation to the initial concerns during the AYN? <u>Oh well her speech and language came on err she started initiating conversations,</u> before she seemed very withdrawn, wanted to play with others but didn't	What are the child's feelings about having had an additional year in nursery? <u>Right well that's an interesting one I don't because it started with this feeling that Ella really didn't ehmm make a lot of connections she was coming to nursery she just came and she liked playing with the</u>	Where is the child likely to go to school next year? <u>Primary school nursery was attached to</u> What differences will the AYN make in the move to school now? <u>Oh right I'm just thinking you mean in terms of skills well certainly err</u>

	<p>attendance because I would say <u>probably until about Christmas her attendance was still very erratic</u> ehmm I mean <u>it took me about 5 attempts before I actually got a face to face with Ella</u> cos every time I organised to go in she wasn't there or she'd be brought in late and I already had other commitments I couldn't just hang around waiting on her coming in err so but then the attendance I think uhh a sort of <u>combination of using the uncle who was often the one who would bring her in I think the nursery had to take a slight firmer line because also with her age you know they were sort of</u></p>	<p><u>kind of back door way I don't think it was maybe made clear enough to mum that it was Ella's statutory you know start of statutory education just because it was nursery doesn't mean to say you know that it did</u> seem to be to me that <u>they tended to back of about the attendance</u> and ehh you know <u>it took a while before that really got dealt with to a degree where mum started to realise she just they just couldn't opt in and out of Ella going to nursery</u> you know they so that that as I say was more or less until Christmas so I mean that was <u>quite a long time attendance was still very erratic and</u> really I don't know it was even less then 50% I think and <u>she</u></p>	<p>was the only other that was the only and also I was involved (was that more support then there had been in place the year before or was it the same kind of level of support that she'd been having) I think emm the previous year I think <u>the difference was that the speech and language therapy were coming to the nursery I think before there was appointments offered at the medical centre which weren't kept</u> and there certainly was appointments offered during one summer you know <u>little social communication groups which they have which</u></p>	<p>seem to know how to start but as <u>time went on was getting more confidence about approaching other children and joining in and playing co-operatively</u> because at the start it was very much also playing you know self directed kind of individual, solitary play want to have more social play and also I think <u>just being involved in all the little projects and that because she started to get more involved in those and you know do some of those things where she obviously would be thinking about it at home coming in with you know sort of ideas</u> I think she'd done at home for nursery so she was <u>certainly</u></p>	<p>toys and there were certain things she enjoyed doing you know so I don't know maybe I suppose after I had done my analysis because she got more involved I <u>don't know if whether it did occur to her that ehhm you know she was older than the other children</u> I mean I'm just not sure because you didn't she wasn't like as if <u>you know the big worry when children stay behind for another year instead of moving on um ehm you know the friendships they've made you see Ella didn't have any of that</u> so the children that moved on it wasn't like <u>she was losing contact with a child she'd formed some kind of bond with</u> so there wouldn't have been I don't think anything of that there umm but <u>whether you know at any point she can sort of being such</u></p>	<p>her <u>speech and language is so much better</u> and she, as I say, <u>will initiate conversation now</u> ehmm so I would think you know where in primary one the teacher's asking the children to volunteer answers and that <u>Ella's much more likely now to put her hand up and offer an answer</u> I think she <u>has made connections now with some of the children so whether the school has managed to you know put her in a class along with I mean she'll be with other children from nursery</u> but whether they've made I I don't know really we never really spoke about that whether they were going to potentially put her alongside other particular</p>
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	<p><u>saying you know she has to come in</u> unless there's very good reasons because ehmm you know the because there was always kind of <u>quite often there were excuses given when she wasn't in</u> so err so they were really <u>trying to sort of get across to mum that really you know it wasn't an optional thing now</u> and that was why the <u>EWO service got involved</u> because eventually the attendance was just so poor but once she started attending and that was I think the frustration for the nursery staff, <u>once she was attending they could start to see the difference</u> it was making just <u>getting her into a routine or having</u></p>	<p><u>did she is a girl that I think did get colds and things like that</u> but I think the <u>community child health came to the first review and they were saying no she hasn't got major medical issues</u> she is a kid that does get colds but they're <u>there's no reason why she couldn't come to</u> she's not somebody who's going to go on to get something more serious it's just but she was getting kept home at the slightest well what seemed to be the slightest excuse ehmm so maybe if yes I think that was a diff maybe it's <u>mum just thought it was going to be more of the same from the previous year</u> where in actual fact this year was really because, because there was a <u>question</u></p>	<p><u>mum didn't really she didn't attend,</u> she wasn't brought to ehmm so I suppose in terms of yeah kind of it was offered not taken more <u>things were kind of taken up or organised it in a way for people to deliver it direct to Ella without relying on her mum to take her</u> because at that time they realised that mum just really couldn't count, <u>mum had her own mental health issues which meant you couldn't really depend on her bringing Ella in to meeting</u> uhh appointments. Support <u>organised differently and people trying to be a bit more creative in</u></p>	<p><u>making more connections with what was happening in nursery</u> I think ehmm kind of I think emm just getting more involved it became ! <u>think more part of her life and I think then the other thing was the nursery staff started to sort of because they were getting a bit more from her they were sort of beginning to recognise that she there were skills there it just needed a bit more help to bring them out</u> which emm she was <u>a child who was quite good at kind of making connections about things you know think about things reflect kind of come back with some new information or</u></p>	<p><u>a physically big girl she kind of looked and thought because the you know the mixed age group</u> it's not kind of one of these nurseries that all the young ones come at one time the <u>age groups are all mixed together so whether at any time she looked and thought about the children being about half the size of her I really don't know ehmm what she made of it</u> I just know that her mum when I met her just about after Christmas around about Christmas time to give her sort of feedback about some of the work I'd been doing ehmm at that point <u>she was saying that yes Ella's saying we do wee bits of homework together and yeah I think she's getting ready for school</u> you know she <u>enjoys this idea that there's homework to</u></p>	<p>children but <u>she certainly has one or two children over the last three months</u> and she was opting to spend time with she was <u>showing preferences to asking being with those children, playing with them</u> (so she has kind of a) yes very much the year before she would have been kind of a loner she's more inclined to have err the children that want to do things together I think she will be able to identify a child she would like to join in with invite them to be with her <u>how she'll get on in the playground I'm not so sure but I don't think there's any worry about her being able to you know nobody will bully her</u> I don't</p>
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	<p><u>more time just to get to know the kids</u> because she wanted to play with the other kids but didn't seem to be to sure how to do it at the start and emm just again all the services that you know like VTSS <u>when they were coming she was there rather than not there you know</u> because ehh so <u>that made a big difference</u> as I say just the fact that it was <u>starting to get into some kind of routine and pattern of attendance getting the inputs that had been organised for her and ehh I think building up relationships with staff</u> obviously as they got to see her more</p>	<p><u>mark for when I started at the beginning talking to staff as to whether Ella was going to need some kind of special placement</u> because you know there was a feeling she'd she was <u>so withdrawn her speech seemed so delayed at times she just seemed not to be with us you know</u> and nursery and staff were kind of saying you know <u>how's she going to cope in primary one she just doesn't seem to be you know communicating taking things on board in a world of her own</u> and you know sort of so there were a lot of concerns that this little girl maybe wouldn't manage to be sorted of accommodated in mainstream but ehhmm so kind of</p>	<p><u>ensuring that she got it</u> rather than I suspect in the previous year it was offered but not taken up for those reasons I mentioned I think it was more like how can we try and make sure she gets the provision oh the other thing was I think Education Welfare got <u>involved</u> but that was this because of poor attendance Well you know <u>we were talking about play therapy at one stage which is where I feel you know there is such a gap</u> you know I just sort of felt that but <u>maybe you know as I say she's got there through her art but as I say she's a wee bit</u></p>	<p>some new ideas ehh you know her drawings were very creative they were very pleased because <u>she started to express herself more through her drawings</u> so some of it <u>was actually getting her there and then her having the chance to do the kind of work they wanted to do with her and build up the relationships</u> (so fundamentally was a big bit just about her attendance) yes I would say the thing was (rather than an additional support need) I suspect maybe if people hadn't I mean the this will all be confidential <u>as far as I gather her mum was ehh her mum had a sort of attempted suicide</u></p>	<p><u>be done and sort of thing but I think it was just that she was enjoying working with her mum you know maybe that her mum was in a mental state to do these things with her</u> they had time together but certainly <u>mum was giving this to me as evidence that Ella had moved on so much now that she had work her concentration had improved she was keen to learn she had wanting to look at letters and words and story books</u> so that was just about at new year time</p>	<p>think I think <u>her mum's very strong on the I think the older boy got bullied so I think she's quite determined that Ella can look after herself pencil skills and all that's come on</u> well the the nursery staff have been delighted with ehhh her drawing skills they say she's quite she's a talent there I didn't realise but I think you said her mum's an (yes she's an artist) which I didn't know so that's maybe no surprise certainly they've been very there's <u>some they were able to comment very positively on something she did with pride</u> so I suppose that side we have left all the kind of early literacy stuff she's been kind of</p>
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		<p>but at the start as time went on (she started to improve) I mean <u>she will carry on needing a bit of emotional support</u> but as time went on <u>we began to see you know that she's got capacities there</u> and (so a difficulty was maybe not being clear enough with mum that although it was still nursery it was the start of statutory education and in a way there was a greater sense of urgency..) <u>and maybe how to get mum involved more</u> now that would have been a hard job because I tried every way I could to even phoning and sending letters saying look you know I can come and do a home visit and maybe see Ella there and time was going on and we were getting names for PAGS and I</p>	<p><u>she had lots of issues I felt about with her mum</u> that and her mum wasn't going to get involved with talking it through I think I said to you <u>I tried to sort of introduce it but the mum just wasn't playing ball</u> and it was almost like I can be so I don't know I just feel sometimes the intervention I mean <u>she was seeing someone from VTSS but they were doing it more like a sort of social skills group turn taking and listening</u> and it did you know she did benefit from that but I just sort of think more of the kind of (whether she's still kind of carrying emotional issues</p>	<p><u>so she had a lot of problems at home</u> which is why the uncle was so involved and supportive with his sister so <u>I think the nursery didn't feel able to put too much pressure on the previous year</u> because of all the issues at the same time it <u>was the sort of family that tended to keep people a bit at arms length as well</u> so they didn't want to kind of push so I suppose really that ante-pre or what would have been her <u>pre-school year was marked by irregular attendance by major family upsets appointments not kept</u> a whole lot of things <u>the child had probably been I think quite</u></p>		<p>interested in and <u>sort of being able to go home and do with mum so hopefully kind of they're doing all of that</u> (so she's got a lot of the foundations for a primary one child now which she wouldn't have had a year ago) yes I think <u>the thing will be just the relationships side</u> because there will be say you know the <u>nursery staff were consciously working on that and I think you know working with each other to give the same messages</u> to Ella to manage in the same way <u>ehhh I don't know who she's going into yet with P1's so I mean obviously there would be liaison and a transition meeting</u> but at that time I don't think</p>
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		<p>didn't know if this wee girl would be somebody who would need to be in PAG 3 or something like that but ehmm I was kind of feeling the pressure a bit I couldn't even do some kind of observation I managed to do a wee tiny bit but not much so what I'm saying is <u>maybe if we'd sort of thought about it sooner we might of thought sort of how can we make it easier for this mum either to kind of accept that you know ehmm we need her involvement in what's happening</u> because her sort of view seemed to be well you know I've given my agreement I'm letting you get on with things and I don't know maybe she wouldn't have been cap I don't know mentally</p>	<p>on with her as she moves into primary one) yeah you know <u>anything that might come up you know watching a programme or she's seen things a girl her age usually wouldn't have done but mum's put a shutter down over it</u> cos I don't know if Ella's been effected by it even if mum has moved on but anyway (so there's still a worry there it sounds like she did move on in some areas but there's still worries about her emotional well being) uh huh <u>the nursery teacher said that's her story she said you know I do worry it's almost you</u></p>	<p><u>traumatised really</u> from what had happened so it wasn't a year where really kind of productive positive things happened I think so eh (do you think she would have made the same rate of progress had she been in primary 1) No I don't think so <u>she needed the play I think if she'd uh given her emotional state I shes a big girl actually that's the thing you've met her she's quite a she was always somebody who stood out because she was quite big for her age but ehmm but I think inside she was still quite young</u> and I'm not sure <u>it would have depended if she'd gone into the P1 teacher, the P1s</u></p>		<p>they'd quite finalised the P1 classes so no name was given but hopefully I mean miss S*** (HT) she's somebody that will take steps you know she knows her staff very well and I'm sure she would influence which teacher would get Ella because she's done that in the past Ella would be placed in it's just <u>last year I went into one primary one class and I wasn't too impressed with the teacher so</u> if Ella went into that teacher's class if she still had P1's and she would have been the nursery teacher from the previous year who'd then gone on to take the P1's <u>there's some very nice good teachers</u> (so fingers crossed that's been planned</p>
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		<p>capable of doing it at the time I don't know (isn't that part of kind of what you're saying the being done by the back door a bit maybe if it had been done more formally if it was said at the meeting statutory school age what 's the plan, how can we help you it would have been more..)</p> <p>Yes that's right cos I think the few contacts I had with mum you know whether when I had the contacts with her she was feeling stronger but <u>she certainly was somebody who would voice her opinions</u> I mean she wasn't somebody that sat and needed somebody to speak for her <u>she was quite clear about her opinions of what she saw as Ella's kind of you know the issues</u></p>	<p><u>know they're quite pleased what they've achieved with Ella but there is this bit she'll be seen as a vulnerable child</u> I think but maybe the drawing and the painting will give her that outlet so obviously <u>she's staying as an open case</u> she's been accepted by <u>outreach speech and language therapy</u> so she'll receive that in school but she's also met the <u>criteria she's got audit support</u> I'm not sure if VTSS is going to be involved any longer, hang on, No I don't think so it was just that one piece of work with several children but they can get them back</p>	<p>last year uhmm there was more then one I think she would have been in trouble because I think the teacher <u>would have taken a firm hand but not sort of tempered with</u> because Ella does need a firm hand she does have to know who's boss but that <u>has to be tempered with something else</u> so I think the <u>nursery staff were sort of very aware of the need to kind of not just give her clear directions and structure and sort of boundaries</u> and a sort of kind but firm approach but also <u>at the times when she maybe just needed a wee bit more of the comforts</u> (so it was a good environment for her...) Yeah</p>	<p>in but it wasn't clear when you last met) How does the child feel about the move to school?</p> <p>Oh I think she was <u>quite excited</u> you know <u>the uniform was bought before the summer holidays</u> which probably wasn't wise given the (yes because they grow!) but mum says she's on a size eight age eight clothes or something so yeah but you <u>know I think and the school bag and things it's all she's ready, she wants to go</u> and of course the benefit is <u>it's just across the playground</u> you know (so it's an easy transition) yeah I think it will be interesting <u>though this child having to get up I think in the morning and her mum having to get her up</u></p>
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		<p>and anyway so and she did kind of make links with Ella and her brother because I think there had been issues and he's a lot older than Ella he's at high school ehmm but there was a lot of issues there <u>and it was almost like I've been through this before and I know it's going to work out so I'm not going to get myself worked up about this</u> but I just feel <u>we could have maybe kind of tried to sort of gone for it a bit more in the early stages of planning</u> (it sounds like people were tiptoeing around and worrying how she was doing not wanting to make it more difficult) that's right, they were yes, but I think she's sort of if you were very clear because if you said anything she would ask questions</p>	<p>in if they need to so I'll keep it open in case they need any further support. Goes on to add...no retentions this year just deferrals, head is retiring, a figure that others won't challenge. <u>I'm not saying it was a bad decision for Ella but maybe if it had been documented we bit more then we could have had clearer goals we could have had maybe times where we could have said look you know attendance is a major issue here at what time when it doesn't improve are we going to take action because it went right on</u></p>		<p><u>and out you know</u> for 9 o'clock 5 to 9 or whatever I mean she had got better about getting to nursery but I mean there's still always a kind of you know the nursery don't you know if you come in at five past 9 (but you'd feel very different at school) yes because you'd miss all the so <u>it will be interesting to hear if mum is getting her out of there in time</u> because I don't think it will do Ella <u>any good if she's in late and a full day</u> well she's been a full day in nursery so the full day she won't be too (and they'll just be building up just now won't they) yeah</p>
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		<p>and she wanted to know exactly what you know what you meant when you said anything so you know <u>I think she's the sort of person that would probably ehmm liked having something more formal or err would have been clearer in err</u> (she would have liked to sign up to that, a plan and if she had a target) yeah and having said that she didn't give permission earlier on to to to have Ella referred so maybe maybe you know ehmm maybe this was only the pace that she could work at and take on board people but I think maybe the nursery maybe well I suppose maybe I was new it's maybe about building trust with them maybe they need to trust you that you'll not</p>	<p><u>until about as I say just before Christmas</u> before the nursery staff realised they really had to start you know being less accommodating you know whereas <u>I think really kind of end of September really I think four to five weeks in</u> if attendance was really as poor as it was proven to be they should of maybe (but I guess that's another dilemma of her still being in nursery because in the school system the alarm bells would have rung as soon as it went below the 80% mark but nurseries aren't used to working in that way) so that's the other thing maybe for</p>			
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		<p>upset this mother by having contact with her talking things through you <u>know I suppose they were kind of nurturing their relationship and having outsiders maybe there is a fear you know we've got so far and then they might come in and upset it all</u> so it could have been that because I was new to the nursery (lots of issues with the benefit of hindsight things could have gone a bit more smoothly)</p>	<p>them em to sort of realise kind of well so <u>there's a few things that I think you know that might have been helpful to have started a bit sooner</u> and as I said maybe getting mum but on the other hand but <u>she hadn't given the permission when (name of previous EP) had been at the multi-agency meeting</u> in the March of the previous year possibly when retention was maybe being mooted but anyway we'll just see. But the visits I made I mean fortunately there were other things I needed to do but the visits I made and the hanging around oh she should be in, we</p>			
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			<p>phoned her mum we reminded her you were coming in I'd been hanging around waiting but I wasted <u>I don't know how many hours just hanging around</u> obviously you'd talk to staff when you can but you know what it's like in nurseries you can't talk to staff for too long and it did get to the point <u>where I was getting really quite frustrated myself so it's a learning experience for me to maybe be more forceful with staff in the future.</u></p>			
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Appendix 9-Showing 2nd Level Analysis Of Case Study Data

Longitudinal Case Study Summary- EP perceptions

Data Source	Benefits of additional Year	Issues with Additional Year	Support	Progress: New skills in relation to ASN	Progress: Social and Emotional Development	Transition
Interview Data-nursery year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Big difference is seen to have made a lot more progress during this year. -Once attendance has improved got into a routine, accessed supports put in place for her, built relationships with staff and peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Formal channels not followed for retention so statutory nature of attendance not communicated to mum. -Clear goals for year involving mum maybe not fully set. -Attendance particularly poor during first term and it took too long for this to be fully and formally addressed. -Still coming late even once this was improved. -Hard for EP to carry out initial assessment, added pressure as staff view was that Erina might need a more specialist placement, led to a lot of wasted EP time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EWO involvement. -Firm line re attendance. -Involvement of uncle. -VTSS -SALT -Services/ support organised to take place in nursery so that E could access these easily. -Possibility of play therapy discussed, but a gap in service, drawing may have offered a similar outlet. -Learning assistant support. -Staff building nurturing relationship with mum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -speech and language improved-initiates conversations now. -More involved in projects in nursery, making connections between nursery and home. -Nursery more part of her life. -Staff recognising skills and capabilities that E has. -Nursery offered an environment where E could play, experience a 'firm but fair' approach and still access the comforts that she needed-this wouldn't have been available in P1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -more confidence in approaching and interacting with other children. -not sure if E is aware of being older than most other children, certainly she is bigger in a group of 3-5 year olds. -Physically large for her age but still a much younger child inside. -mum shared with EP E's desire to do homework, EP wonders whether E is enjoying the fact that mum is a mental state to do activities with her at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -primary nursery is attached to. -will initiate conversations in school. -more likely to put her hand up and offer relevant answers. -has some specific friendships which hopefully will be maintained -unsure how she'll manage playground, but thinks mum has encouraged E to stand up for herself (issues with brother noted). -now has a routine with working with mum at home. -staff will need to ensure relationships side of things is maintained. -who P1 teacher is will be important

Appendix 10-Example to show part of final condensation of data for discussion in case study chapters

Data Source	Support put in place	New skills in relation to areas of identified need	Social and emotional development
Time point 1: Interview data from parents	-Full time nursery place -Speech Therapist -Mum not aware of ASP -Visits to P1 with other nursery children	-Will sit and listen to stories, etc. -Language skills have greatly improved, putting sentences together, speech therapist pleased with progress	-Says goodbye to a number of different children -Probably not aware that she's had an additional year in nursery.
Time point 1: Interview data from nursery staff	-Learning assistant (5 hours) -SALT suggestions -VTSS group -ASP -1:1 talking time with adult -Visual timetable -EWO -OT referral	-Language skills have improved -Finds it easier to understand nursery rules and routines. -Finds it easier to move onto something else, even when not an activity of her choosing	-Interaction with peers has improved, words go backwards and forwards. -Doesn't seem to be aware of having had additional year in nursery -May be aware that she's older than other children, but children are usually proud of this.
Time point 1: Interview data from EP at time point 1 (nursery)	-Firm line re attendance -SALT etc. in nursery -Nurturing relationship built with family -Play therapy discussed -EWO, LA, VTSS	-Initiates conversations now -More involved in projects in nursery, making connections between nursery and home -Nursery more part of her life -Staff recognise Ella's skills and capabilities	-More confident in approaching and interacting with other children. -Not sure if she is aware of being oldest, certainly biggest in the 3-5 year old group -Physically large but a younger child inside
Time point 1: Documentary sources	-ASP -Review meetings on several occasions	-Transition record - following rules, listening and concentrating for longer -SALT report: improved grammar scores on formal assessment carried out in April and December 2008	
Time point 1: Author's interpretation of Ella's perspective using mosaic data	Observation, Ella sometimes seeks out adults to show them her work or what she's doing. Smiles when adult responds/ gives praise.	-Is able to verbally let author know when she's finished with the interview: 'That's enough now, ok!'	-Play is mainly solitary during observation -Names female peer as favourite person in conferencing questions

Appendix 11-Example Of Initial Analysis Of Children's Mosaic Data

Case 2 Mosaic Summary Nursery Year

Case 2	Observation	School Photos	Own Photos	Adult comments	Conferencing questions
Resting in quiet room/listening to story tape	◆		☺-1 picture		
Art and craft area	◆		☺-3 pictures	☺enjoys this type of activity and is successful at it.	
Talks to adult	◆				
Dresses up	◆				
Favourite things					☺ I like playing best, the grown ups play with you
Don't like/difficult					☺ falling over
Computer			☺-1 picture		
Water tray			☺-2 pictures- water tray and plastic dolphin		☺ favourite place whales points to plastic figures in the water tray.
Playdough/ Cooking area			Ok-2 pictures		
<i>Library</i>		Ok			
<i>Gym hall</i>		☺			
<i>Playground</i>			Ok-1 picture		
<i>Smartboard</i>					
<i>House play area</i>		Ok			
<i>Dining hall</i>					
<i>Place to line up</i>		Ok			
<i>Cloakroom</i>		☺	☺-2 pictures		
<i>Classroom</i>		Ok			
<i>Books</i>			☺-2 pictures Ok-2 pictures		
<i>Marking box</i>					
<i>Drama room</i>		Ok			
<i>Sports area</i>					
<i>Drawing</i>					
<i>Magnetic letters</i>			☺-1 picture of alphabet poster		

NB: Italics denote pictures of school taken by P1s, 2 did not want to look at all the pictures. She told the author, 'that's enough now', after looking at about half so the task was discontinued at this point. Where she took a similar picture of her nursery it has been denoted next to the school photo.

Case 2 Mosaic Summary P1 Year

Case 2	Observation	Own Photos	Adult comments	Conferencing questions
PE lesson, whole year group	◆			
Introduction to task on carpet	◆			
Open ended maths problem solving task	◆			
Why do you come to school?				Because I'm not a baby anymore, I grew up, I'm best
Favourite people			☺ mum mentions 2 likes her teacher and will find it hard to get to know a new one in P2 ☺ teacher notes 2 has made some friendships this year	☺ Names 3 peers, says one boy's crisps smell nice
People/ things I don't like			☹ teacher notes 2 has misunderstandings with peers and gets very upset at these times	☹ mentions arguments with peers
<i>Minibeast figures and play area</i>		☺ -5 pictures		☺ minibeast cave is my favourite place
<i>Doll and dolls house</i>		☺ -1 picture		
<i>Play construction pieces</i>		☺ - 1 picture		☺ I like noisy choosing. On my best day, I made a technology kit; I made the same one and remembered the bits.
<i>Children's art work, including own</i>		☺ -3 pictures		
<i>Class photo</i>		☺ -1 picture		
<i>Reading scheme words</i>		☺ -1 picture	☹ teacher notes reading is an area of difficulty for 2	☺ I like reading ☹ I don't like reading
<i>Cutting and drawing area</i>		☺ -1 picture		
<i>Children doing maths activity</i>		☺ -2 pictures		
<i>Maths puzzle game</i>		☹ -1 picture		☹ I don't like maths puzzles & hard adding up

NB: Italics reflect photos taken by child, normal text is based on observations or comments made by the child.